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THE ELECTION ISSUE

On a largely liberal campus, how is the election talked about in classrooms?

By MADELEINE KAPTEIN
Managing Editor

As the 2024 U.S. presidential election quickly approaches, classes at Middlebury covering American politics and economics are focusing on contemporary election-related material, whether by design or due to the election's increasing prevalence across disciplines. In this year's particularly contentious, polarizing election, whose result is widely understood to be pivotal to American democracy, teaching and being a student in election-relevant classes is a compelling position to occupy.

It is no secret that Middlebury students hold mostly liberal political views. In The Campus' Zeitgeist 6.0 survey, 79% of student respondents who rated

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International students hold their breath as American classmates cast their votes

By HUGO ZHANG & LEMONA XU
Online Editor & *Contributing Writer*

As a global learning community, Middlebury College brings together international students, staff and faculty from over 50 countries each year. Fourteen percent of the student body are international students, and although many of them cannot cast votes on Nov. 5, they are closely following the election, aware of its potential impact on their experience at Middlebury and on U.S. relations with their home countries.

Celina Xu '28 is a Chinese citizen who has been studying in the U.S. for over five years without permanent residency. She spoke about many changes in foreign policies in relation to China

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SKILES ROBERTS-SALVADOR

ESTHER CHARLESTIN CHALLENGES PHIL SCOTT AS HE SEEKS FIFTH TERM AS GOVERNOR

By MANDY BERGHELA
Senior Local Editor

As Vermonters prepare to head to the polls on Nov. 5, the race for governor is in its final stretch. Four-time incumbent Republican Phil Scott faces a challenge from Democrat Esther Charlestin.

Scott, a lifelong Vermonter raised in Barre, has served as the state's 82nd governor since 2017. He is known for his widespread popularity, maintaining the highest approval rating among U.S. governors for over two years, currently standing at 81%, according to Morning Consult.

Before his governorship, Scott was a business owner, running DuBois Construction until it was sold to Barrett Trucking in 2017. His political career began in 2000 when he won a seat in the Vermont Senate, where he served five consecutive terms. During his tenure, he held key roles, including Vice Chair of the Transportation Committee and Chair of the Institutions Committee. In 2010, he was elected as Vermont's 79th lieutenant governor.

Charlestin, who calls herself a "Vermonter by choice," moved to the state in 2019, and worked for Middlebury College as a residential director. During this time, she lived in both Coffrin and Atwater Halls, while also serving as the Assistant Director of Community Standards.

In 2021, Charlestin won a seat on the Middlebury Selectboard and was reelected in 2022. However, she was unable to complete her term due to struggles with finding affordable housing — an issue that has been central to her campaign, and a key topic during this year's Clifford Symposium, as it is a concern that resonates with many Vermonters

Charlestin also served as the Dean of Culture and Climate at Middlebury Union Middle School (MUMS), but ultimately resigned due to experiences with racism. She described receiving repeated microaggressions that eventually escalated into direct attacks in the form of slurs and hate speech. Facing these challenges firsthand has deepened her commitment to "creating a just and equitable world, where every voice is heard and respected" as outlined in her campaign mission statement.

Charlestin explained why she was entering into the race for the gubernatorial seat in an interview with The Campus.

"I'm running for governor, well, for one because this is my way of engaging in our democracy, but also because I want Vermont to be a place

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PANTHERS IN POLITICS: MEET THE MIDDLEBURY ALUMNI RUNNING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

THE WHITE HOUSE / ADAM SCHULTZ

Ben LaBolt '03 was recently promoted in August to Senior Adviser to President Joe Biden

By RYAN McELROY
Editor in Chief

While only seven percent of Middlebury graduates go on to pursue careers in government, law and policy, those who do have a considerable influence on the direction of federal, state and local policymaking.

Alumni of one of the college's most popular departments lead Supreme Court confirmation battles, lobby legislators in Montpelier and run political campaigns in the tightest of battleground districts. Some are political junkies; others are avowedly apolitical. This week, The Campus spoke with 11 former Panthers who are shaping the course of American politics and government in the 21st century.

"An Inside Game on the Hill"

White House Communications Director and Senior Adviser to President Joe Biden Ben LaBolt '03 has worked in politics for over 20 years after getting his start through summer internships on the Hill, followed by working on Howard Dean's presidential campaign in 2004. In his current position, he advises the president on major strategy while ensuring the executive branch connects with over 300 million Americans.

"Communications is constantly shifting, that's what makes it exciting. And digital transformation has been at the heart of that," LaBolt said in an interview with The Campus. He leads the

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Lieutenant governor seeks to fend off Republican challenger

RACE TO TEST GOP APPEAL IN VERMONT

By KATRINA SCHWARZ
Local Editor

The 2024 lieutenant governor race in Vermont is shaping up to be a noteworthy clash between two experienced politicians: incumbent David Zuckerman, representing the Vermont Progressive and Democratic Parties, and Republican candidate John Rodgers.

After growing up in Brookline, Mass., Zuckerman attended the University of Vermont (UVM), where he majored in Environmental Studies. He has served as lieutenant governor since 2017 and held positions in both the Vermont House and State Senate. His campaign emphasizes continuity and his

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Addison County Senators face challengers in race for Vermont legislature

By MACY DAGGITT
Contributing Writer

On this year's Election Day, two Vermont State Senate seats for Addison County will be up for election. Democratic incumbents Ruth Hardy and Christopher Bray are facing challenges from two Republican candidates, Landel Cochran and Steven Heffernan.

State senators, who represent their constituent counties in the Vermont Senate, are elected for two year terms. On their ballots, voters are asked to select two candidates, and the two candidates who receive the most votes take office.

Hardy is seeking her fourth term in the Vermont Senate, where she currently serves on the Health and Welfare Committee, the Canvassing Committee — a subgroup of

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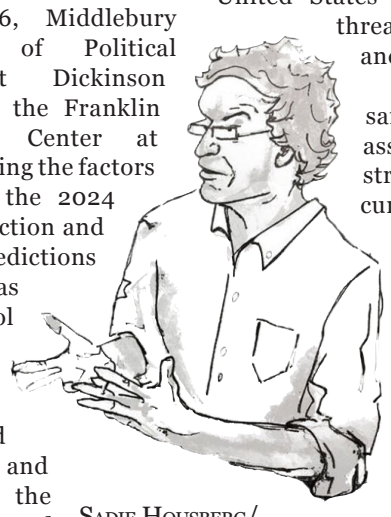
Can Matthew Dickinson tell us who will win the presidential election?

By LUKE POWER
Contributing Writer

On Oct. 16, Middlebury Professor of Political Science Matt Dickinson gave a talk in the Franklin Environmental Center at Hillcrest analyzing the factors that influence the 2024 presidential election and offering his predictions on its outcome as part of the Carol Rifelj Lecture Series. Dickinson has published several books and articles about the presidency and provided election forecasts for several previous elections; he accurately predicted Biden's victory in 2020.



Sadie Housberg/
The Middlebury Campus

His prediction this time around? It's too close to call.

"The predicted popular vote margin and the predicted electoral vote margin of 24 votes are smaller than the standard errors. That means that the race is essentially too close to call," Dickinson said in the talk.

The model that Dickinson used to formulate his prediction points to a razor-thin lead for Vice President Harris, who he predicted will win the popular vote by 2.6% and the presidency with 281 electoral votes. Regardless, this result is within the margin of error.

Dickinson relies on historical models made by other scholars across the country to arrive at his conclusion. Each model focuses on what Dickinson calls the fundamentals of the race.

"Fundamentals are basic indicators of how the world is going. So macroeconomic conditions — is disposable income expanding or decreasing? Are we at war or at peace? Meaning that fundamentals are the set of factors — many outside of the control of the president — that shape an election," Dickinson said.

For example, the growth rate of disposable income at the beginning of an election year is historically correlated with an incumbent party's vote share in that election. Fundamentals-based models look at the race from an objective, bird's eye view and are quite distinct from poll-based models, like those run by Decision Desk HQ (DDHQ), The Economist and 538, according to Dickinson.

"The most important difference ... [is that] those poll-based forecasts can't tell why an election turns out the way it did," Dickinson said.

The fundamentals that have the most predictive power are often in place well before Election Day.

"The fundamentals generally are in place by Labor Day, so most of our predictions are made in August or September, and we just kind of go hibernate for the cold months, and then we wake up on Nov. 5 and get the pats on the back for accurately predicting the election," Dickinson said.

But what role is left to campaigns if the race can be predicted over the summer?

"Campaigns are crucial for making this model work, because what campaigns do is they enlighten voters about the fundamentals," Dickinson explained in the talk, drawing from the work of political scientist Lynn Vavreck, who posits that the incumbents favored by fundamentals will run a "clarifying campaign."

"[A clarifying campaign] is a campaign that's premised on the economy, talking about if the economy is going to help me, or if I don't think that's going to help me, I got to switch the narrative," Dickinson said.

Switching the narrative away from the fundamentals means running an "insurgency campaign." According to Dickinson, insurgency campaigns lean on issues such as abortion rights, the Jan. 6 United States Capitol attack, threats to democracy and immigration.

Yet Dickinson said that assigning these strategies to the current campaigns of former President Trump and Vice President Harris is not easy. What effect will the last-minute switch of President Biden for Vice President Harris have on voters? And with a former president running for a non-consecutive second term, it is difficult to determine if this race has an 'incumbent' or not.

As the campaigns stake out their closing arguments, their strategies have become clearer to Dickinson.

"Harris wants to make this about democracy, about abortion and about Trump as a threat to our system of government. Trump wants to make this about the economy and immigration," Dickinson said.

Regardless of the result, Dickinson points to evidence of a sizable racial realignment in politics, with minority groups that have historically backed Democrats migrating in huge numbers toward supporting Republicans as something to pay attention to on election night.

"The Democratic Party, particularly white Democrats, have become increasingly liberal," Dickinson said. "We are increasingly separated from where voters of color are — they are ideologically much more moderate."

Democrats are gaining with college-educated voters, making them a key part of Harris's coalition.

"The key question that will determine the outcome of this election is, can Harris run up bigger margins for Democrats among college-educated [voters] compared to the widening margins for Trump among working-class voters?" Dickinson said.

A student in Dickinson's current U.S Elections class, Aliya Hosford '25, attended the lecture and found it eye-opening.

"I thought the lecture was really interesting... I enjoy his lecturing style and find it particularly engaging," Hosford wrote in an email to The Campus.

She was also impressed by Dickinson's ability to bring in multiple viewpoints.

"I also think that he raised some points that many people are not willing to talk about/don't want to consider to be true," she wrote.

The anticipated closeness of the race is noteworthy. Public polling aggregates show the seven swing states are within 2%, and the key states in the midwest have candidate leads of no more than 1%. While polling methods have been adjusted this year to increase accuracy, they are not able to predict down to tenths of percentage points and any systemic polling error could result in one candidate unpredictably sweeping the swing states. However, in both 2016 and 2020, polling underestimated Trump's support by multiple points.

Like the fundamentals, current polling-based models have the race at a toss-up, nearly 50/50, which is unlikely to change in the final days of the race.

DEBATES, DOOR-KNOCKING AND FREE DORITOS: COLLEGE REPUBLICANS AND COLLEGE DEMOCRATS

By COLE CHAUDHARI
Managing Editor

If you walk into Hillcrest 103 at 8 p.m. every other Wednesday or Axinn 229 at the same time on alternating Mondays this semester, you'll find students taking a break from their busy academic and personal schedules to discuss current events, the latest news out of Washington and American popular culture — and eating free snacks.

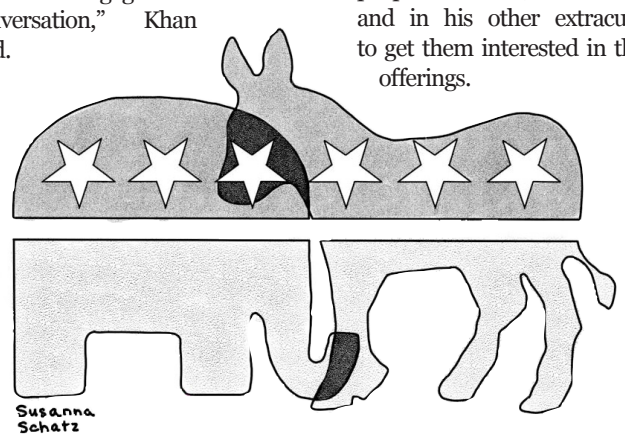
Enter College Democrats and College Republicans. Led by students for students, these two organizations are on-campus clubs that aim to promote student involvement in politics, spanning local, regional and national levels of engagement.

Though primarily discussion-based, the two clubs have been increasing their programming in light of the upcoming presidential election, and have hosted events like phone-banking sessions, post-presidential debate debriefings, organized door-knocking excursions and trips to rallies. The two clubs also plan to host joint discussions and debates in the future, after the election and into the spring semester.

For Norah Khan '27 and Madeleine Kiblinger '26, current co-presidents of College Democrats, the club first became appealing because they were seeking spaces to discuss American politics and be exposed to a variety of different viewpoints.

Khan and Kiblinger discussed their paths to joining College Democrats and becoming club leaders in an interview with The Campus.

"I wanted to have a space where I could share that and talk to people, not necessarily because they think the same way as me, but I just wanted to hear what other people think and engage in some of that conversation," Khan said.



Kiblinger echoed Khan's sentiment, adding that the political composition of her home state did not often allow her to discuss politics openly and that College Democrats offered a compelling space for this.

"At first, I just came and I just listened — it was a good way for me to just hear the highlights. 'Okay, this is what's going on right now, and I can freely ask questions.' It was really good. I'm from South Carolina, so my hometown was super red, and I've always had this burning need to talk about politics that I've kind of repressed in my hometown," Kiblinger explained.

As an organization, College Democrats has seen an uptick in participation and attendance this semester because of the election, according to Khan.

"I would say we've had more engagement this semester so far compared to the last few semesters, given that it is a really important time in the year. Everyone's anticipating the election, and it's provided us with a unique opportunity to have an array of discussions surrounding certain topics. And we get to see new faces," Khan said.

College Republicans, resumed and led this year by Joseph Jacobson '27 after a two-year hiatus, has also been engaging with the election and Vermont politics more locally. Jacobson spoke to his motivations for reinstating the club and bringing it back into active campus life.

"I just wanted to make sure that there were two sides of the political spectrum present on campus. I felt like there was a void that just needed building to bring the campus back to the middle, and we could have diverse ideas, beliefs and a more vibrant intellectual community," Jacobson said.

For Jacobson, recruiting members to College Republicans was a gradual process of speaking to people after class, in the dining halls and in his other extracurriculars to get them interested in the club's offerings.

"It's mainly just talking to people. Going up to people after class and saying 'Hey, would you be interested in this?'" Jacobson said.

Like Kiblinger and Khan, Jacobson hopes to provide an open space where interested students can discuss political events without reservation and share opinions of all stripes. Especially at Middlebury, where the political allegiances of students trend overwhelmingly to the left, Jacobson believes in the necessity of establishing forums for conservative expression.

"It's a space where ideas that may be not entirely appreciated on campus can be talked about in an open debate setting. We'll talk about things from the perspective of the Republican Party or conservatives in America, which includes many diverse perspectives. We've talked about the conflict in the Middle East, we talked about free speech on campus, and then we will also give updates to the members and everything about events we're doing and advocacy stuff," Jacobson explained.

Looking beyond the election, both College Democrats and College Republicans aspire to keep political involvement up throughout the remainder of the semester and into next year.

College Democrats is in the process of planning a networking event for members in order to connect them with Middlebury alumni who work in Washington, D.C., according to Khan and Kiblinger.

Jacobson emphasized that, for College Republicans, the focus has been and will remain to ensure the on-campus presence of conservative and Republican political discourse. He explained that, while the election has been discussed in College Republicans meetings, their primary frame of reference is always in relation to the college and to Vermont.

"There is a significant group of people who are not necessarily interested in focusing on the presidential election, even though we talk about it, of course, but in terms of what we really want to fix — we want to focus on free speech on campus and helping elect Republicans in Vermont," he said.

Editor's Note: Norah Khan '27 is an Arts & Culture editor for The Campus.

Bill McKibben discusses the election and climate

By MAGGIE BRYAN
Senior News Editor

In an era marked by climate change and unprecedented environmental disasters, the topic of climate has been notably absent from this year's presidential campaigns. Although the majority of Americans support some form of action, climate change is one of the most politically divisive issues in American politics and one of the least important issues to voters — only 21% of voters cite it as being a very important factor in their vote in a recent Gallup poll.

For the college's Schumann Distinguished Scholar, author and climate activist Bill McKibben, however, this election is the most important of our time, and climate is at its center. McKibben has written countless articles and spoken at a vast number of events this election cycle, and his message is clear: Voters are poised to choose between two radically different outlooks for the planet. Vice President Kamala Harris calls for a continuation of President Biden's renewable energy investments and efforts, and former President Donald Trump calls for a full-fledged return to an economy based on fossil fuels, which McKibben said could have devastating implications for our planet's well-being.

McKibben has been crisscrossing the country — from Arizona to Pennsylvania — with Third Act, a group that he co-founded in 2021 that includes about 100,000 climate-concerned older Americans. Third Act recently established a Political Action Committee (PAC) called GrayPac, which allows them to campaign as a non-profit.The group has done advocacy and campaign work in several swing states, holding rallies, encouraging door-to-door work, sending postcards and phone banking.

Although some of these campaign efforts have been climate-based, McKibben said that depoliticizing climate as an issue goes beyond campaigning.

"I think [climate] will be depolarized once the political power of the fossil fuel industry is broken, and I think that will happen once we've built out more significant solar, wind, and battery resources," he wrote.

Developing America's renewable energy portfolio through big and small projects will break down the power of the fossil fuel industry and its political regime, according to McKibben. But doing so is a tricky cycle. In order to loosen the grip of fossil fuels, McKibben said we must continue to build renewable energy sources in the meantime — a seemingly impossible ask under a second Trump presidency, which experts say will halt the growth of renewables and draw attention farther away from the climate.

"Polarization will only end when the power of the fossil fuel industry is broken, mainly by a lot more solar farms like the one Midd just switched on," he wrote to The Campus, referring to the college's new solar field on South Street Extension.

If this election is as salient for climate and renewables as McKibben suggested, what is the role of academic institutions like Middlebury that profess their commitment to sustainability and renewable energy?

"I think the College should be pretty hands-off," McKibben wrote. "Politics is a duty of citizenship, and students should be prepared to undertake it on their own, without help from professors and administrators."

He added that Middlebury students still have power to take action on climate and the election in the final days of the race.

"It's not that hard to get involved," he wrote. "We're happy to let anyone of any age join in at Third Act, or check out Vote Save America."

PANTHERS IN POLITICS

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communications team at the White House to schedule interviews for the president, whether it be with social media influencers, late-night talk show hosts or podcasters.

LaBolt also deals with managing major crises — his job entails anything that arises in the world and demands the White House's attention. He was recently promoted to senior adviser to the president in August, but previously played a key role in running communications for Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's confirmation in 2022.

It was not his first rodeo: LaBolt had previously worked on the Senate confirmations of Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan under the Obama administration. He emphasized that targeting senators during these confirmation efforts is inherently political.

"It's really an inside game on the Hill and in the D.C. media to convince the senators who need to vote to confirm the nominee," he added.

After a tumultuous summer that saw President Biden suspend his presidential bid and Vice President Kamala Harris assume a breakneck 100-day campaign, LaBolt said the work the communications team prepared for the election has played an important role in allowing a smooth transition.

"When President Biden was the candidate, obviously, I was very intimately involved and there every step of the way. And when he endorsed the Vice President, she became the nominee," he explained. "She's got her own team and an infrastructure, but we had really built the campaign apparatus that was ready for her, and that had a big impact."

When it comes to making a case for the Democratic party, Katie Gladstone '13.5 and Elana Schrager '17 may be the experts. Both currently work at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) as regional political directors covering the "Frontiers" — Alaska, Colorado and much of the Midwest — and the Northeast, respectively.

This cycle they have built campaign operations in House districts across the country, first recruiting candidates and training staff, and now tracking them through the home stretch.

"By the end, we have full functioning campaigns, what we're doing is making sure that everybody has the resources that they need to be successful and go take back the House," Gladstone explained.

Both DCCC directors have been battle-tested by working on campaigns in previous elections straight out of Middlebury: Gladstone fundraised for Sen. Jackie Rosen in 2018 and frontline candidate Rep. Susan Wild in Penn., while Schrager most recently managed a successful campaign in Colorado's eighth congressional district in 2022.

"I think what a campaign manager does is you essentially narrow down the things you can control, and do really, really well at the things you control," Schrager said, referring to the race which elected Rep. Yadira Caraveo by under 2,000 votes. Although they have not been Middlebury students for a few years, reflecting back, Gladstone emphasized the unique level of political engagement at the college.

"I think it was just a privilege to be part of such an engaged student body," Gladstone explained. "My advice to you as a current student would be to really appreciate that before you leave."

Some alumni who work in Washington, D.C. have carried over the international perspective from their time at Middlebury to their work now. Terry Crouch, who graduated from the Middlebury Language Schools in 2007, now works as the Government Liaison & Consular Affairs to Monaco.

"Half my day is in French," Crouch explained, adding that his masters in French from Middlebury has proved essential to coordinating diplomatic efforts with citizens of Monaco.

"The diversity of the student body and the faculty in terms of their languages was a nice template for how to work with people in the government and across the various agencies here in the U.S.," he added.

Luke Kauth '21 works as a legislative assistant focused on energy and climate for Sen. Peter Welch, whose office is currently in recess as the final weeks of campaigning heat up.

"One of my favorite parts of the job is developing ideas and working with experts on drafting legislation to address climate change, protect environmental rights, and other issues," Kauth said.

He emphasized the role his studies in Political Science and especially the English department play now in analysis and writing legislation. "I wouldn't trade my English major for anything," Kauth said.

A Statewide State of Mind

Not every political science major joins the 'D-triple-C' or runs national strategy out of the West Wing, however. Some graduates work in nonpartisan roles at the state and local level where they are instrumental to shaping legislation and running advocacy campaigns.

Daniel Dietz '03 works for the Oregon Legislature as a senior analyst for healthcare policy in the nonpartisan legislative policy and research office. Originally inspired by his work under Professor of Moral Science Heidi Grasswick and time spent in the Peace Corps in Peru, Dietz pursues analytical work in his home state that has a real policy impact.

"I see my role as demystifying government and policies so that people who are elected to make decisions about how policies work have access to the levers and the tools to operate the functions of state government," he explained.

Dietz said he draws on his liberal arts education when coordinating with lawyers and PhDs in the legislature or evaluating new healthcare policy proposals.

"The ability to think critically across those disciplines is something I do every day," Dietz said. "I think that comes from the liberal arts perspective — to know a little bit about a lot of different things."

Anika Heilweil '21.5 echoed his same point on the liberal arts perspective, although she applies that lens to a different state capitol much closer to her alma mater. Heilweil works as a campaign manager for the Public Assets Institute in Montpelier, Vt., where she lobbies state legislators about increasing state revenue.

"The liberal arts framework that Middlebury utilizes, I think, has been really helpful as far as recognizing the interconnectivity between issues," Heilweil said, adding that when lobbying state legislators, her organization weighs a variety of issues such as affordability, childcare, access to housing and other priorities for Vermonters.

Some Panthers are just embarking on their endeavors into state government. Nikki Sadat '23.5 began working as an intake coordinator for the Civil Rights Division of the Massachusetts State Attorney General's office last month, where she processes civil rights complaints. Having just graduated, she is glad for the opportunity to work on human rights at the state level.

"I was stoked to be employed and it felt like a good first step for figuring out if I'm interested in law school and exploring human rights," Sadat explained. She added that learning to work with a range of people who submit complaints to the office has given her firsthand experience with the issues she learned about at Middlebury.

"Middlebury prepares you more than you think," Sadat said.

The Not-For-Profit Panthers

Not every Middlebury student felt as impacted by their political science coursework, however. Ruby Edlin '19.5 shared that her current work as an advocacy campaign manager focused on elections and government at the Brennan Center for Justice in New York was inspired by her experience protesting controversial guest speaker Charles Murray in 2017.

"A lot of professors in the political science department were disdainful of student protestors at the time, and I totally disagreed with some of their views. I don't think I felt a community in the Poli Sci department," Edlin explained.

She initially worked on political campaigns following her graduation but soon switched to the Brennan Center to gain a role in protecting U.S. elections beyond each race.

"It has been interesting to see the niche issues I worked on now be front-page issues," she said, citing election certification and tabulating votes by hand as two examples that have received extensive coverage recently.

Another nonprofit working in the months leading up to Nov. 5 is the ACLU of Florida, where Nick Warren '15 works as a staff attorney on various initiatives, including the upcoming vote to codify access to abortion by amending the state constitution.

"The initiative has involved a lot of legal issues. We've been in and out of court since the start of the year to counter the illegal actions taken by the state of Florida in their campaign against the amendment," Warren explained.

Warren said he still refers back to what he learned a decade ago at Middlebury as an American Studies major.

"The course 'American Public Policy' still provides the framework for how I think of legislation and how lawmaking happens," Warren said.

Whether they felt inspired by Professor of Political Science Matthew Dickinson — who was namedropped by several alumni — or found the liberal arts formative to their conception of politics, the college's graduates will play an important role in the Nov. 5 election.

Their work does not stop at the ballot box, however: In state capitals, battleground districts and the halls of Washington, D.C., the college's graduates are hard at work shaping the course of U.S. government in the modern era.

MIA LEVINGS/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

On a largely liberal campus, how is the election talked about in classrooms?

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student respondents who rated their political views on a scale of 0–10 — with 0 being the most liberal and 10 being the most conservative — placed themselves in the 0-3 range. The most common response, chosen by 30% of respondents, was a two. Only 10% of survey respondents described themselves as leaning conservative, having chosen a rating greater than five.

Some professors acknowledge that the majority of their students support Vice President Kamala Harris for president over former President Donald Trump, but avoid sharing their own views in classrooms, instead focusing their classes on the analytical and scholarly aspects of the election. Professor of Political Science Matthew Dickinson — who has published several books and articles on the presidency, presidential elections and other national governing institutions — said that students self-select into his classes because they know he will never share his political views, even if his colleagues do.

Dickinson is currently teaching the courses "American Presidency," "U.S. National Elections" and a first year seminar, "American President Biography." In his U.S. National Elections course, students are tasked with forming their own predictions for the outcome of the election, an assignment which is due on Election Day.

"I think most of [my students] have preferences, but my courses are courses in which students really feel comfortable no matter what their views are discussing things, and there's no ideological litmus test or anything," Dickinson said. "We're interested in the why, why is Harris ahead in the polls, why wasn't Biden doing well, we don't discuss a lot of, why should you vote for Harris, why should you vote for Trump."

Bert Johnson, professor of Political Science who also specializes in American politics, is teaching "Introduction to American Politics" and the seminar "Future of U.S. Democracy," a course he designed with November's presidential election in mind. Discussions in both classes touch on the election frequently, covering topics such as disinformation, money in politics, presidential power, populism as an issue and democratic backsliding. Like Dickinson, Johnson does not share his personal views in discussions.

"I decided, 'Hey, I want to teach a class that is relevant to the election,' and as part of that class read as much as the brand new contemporary research on U.S. politics as I can, and bring students along with me in that conversation," Johnson said.

Johnson also said that he thinks talking about any election in classes is important, but that the high-stakes nature of this election has been particularly motivational for students.

"I think in some ways the students that I have in my classes are really inspiring in that there's an optimism there that I don't always see in my audiences," Johnson said.

In Associate Professor of Economics Obie Porteous's "International Economics: Theory and Policy" class, a course required for all International Politics & Economics majors, students have read and discussed recent news articles pertaining to the trade tariff policies of the presidential candidates, including "A Second Trump Presidency Stands to Radically Remake World Trade" and "Off the charts: How Trump tariffs would shock U.S, world economies."

"Students are always eager to see the real-world connection to what they're learning in the classroom and how this relates to what's going on in the real world, and so for me the election is providing that real-world connection," Porteous said.

Porteous has found it helpful to explicitly recognize in class that students probably have different opinions and strong feelings about the election and encourage them to consider this reality before they speak.

"I try to approach classroom discussion of election-related topics as objectively as possible, so that students don't feel like I'm trying to kind of push an agenda on them," Porteous said. "That doesn't mean that if we do the objective analysis of the policy and find that one candidate's proposed policy is objectively better than the other, well, I don't want to shy away from that finding."

Caitlin Budzik '25.5, a political science major enrolled both in Dickinson's U.S. Elections class and in Johnson's Future of U.S. Democracy seminar, said that student perspectives shared in class discussions are almost exclusively liberal and that if students hold conservative views, they refrain from sharing them. Instead, when there is tension in classes, it is usually between those who are pessimistic and those who are optimistic about the election and the future of U.S. politics.

"There's definitely emotion. It's a lot of nervousness just because of the political leanings of Middlebury's campus, but I think that that's always been the case in my poli-sci classes," Budzik said.

Ryan Muller '25, also a political science major enrolled in U.S Elections, Future of U.S Democracy and Professor of Political Science Murray Dry's "American Constitutional Law" class, echoed Budzik's statements about the general consensus among students that Harris is the preferred candidate and palpable anxieties in class over a potential Trump victory.

"I think for the most part people are able to have generally pretty open and honest conversations about is, and I think that's something I can often find lacking on Middlebury's campus — the ability to speak freely about things, so I think professors especially have done good job about letting those conversations happen when they pop up," Muller said.

Muller corroborated that Dickinson takes a particularly impartial pedagogical approach, never having stated an opinion about a candidate in any of the several classes he has taken with him, while Dry has been more open about his opposition to Trump.

The content of American politics-based courses will shift during election week and once a candidate has won.

"I usually devote the first class after the election to talk a little bit about those concerns, to talk about maybe some of the fears [students] might have and some of the hopes they might have as well," Dickinson said. "We will get to that — my course is not entirely devoid of a discussion of what they kind of hoped would happen."

However, Dickinson also noted that he is inclined to put the election in historical context during these post-election classes, bring the discussion back to political science and reiterate the limited power of the president.

"The next couple days after the election will be a little bit post-mortem," Muller said. "Taking a step back, taking a breath, surveying the scene and basically from there, being like, what's next from either candidate?" Muller said.

WATCH PARTIES, PUNDITRY, AND PIZZA: HOW MIDDLEBURY SPENDS ELECTION NIGHT

By SAM LUEKE
Contributing Writer

After months of preparations, the 2024 presidential election is finally closing in on Election Day. For many, this will be their first time casting a ballot; others will be old pros. Regardless of experience, all elections are, of course, different — but this does not mean we do not have habits and traditions. During the 2020 presidential election, the Covid-19 pandemic halted the vast majority of election traditions at Middlebury, but this year, campus election events are back in full swing.

Middlebury will be hosting a screening of election coverage by CNN on election night on the big screen in the Grille in McCullough Student Center. Professor of Political Science Bert Johnson will be moderating and offering live analysis. Per tradition, there will be snacks, commentary and community.

This won't be the first election-related event hosted on campus this semester. MiddVotes — Middlebury's student-run nonpartisan voter registration and education organization — hosted debate watching parties for both the presidential and the vice presidential debates in Wilson Hall. Students gathered, popped popcorn and listened to Johnson and Professor of Political Science Matthew Dickinson provide commentary and analysis during commercial breaks.

Both professors stuck around throughout and after the debates to answer any questions students may have.

"What me and Matt try to do, when we're calling it like that, is to give a little context, and to invite people to think a little bit more carefully about some of the claims that are being made on television — about what this or that means, or how to interpret something," Johnson said.

Far from being polarizing, these events provide a space where casual politics can be engaging, productive and civil. Middlebury College Republicans President Joseph Jacobson '27 attested to the inclusivity of MiddVotes' events.

"I really think MiddVotes does a good job being objective and fair. It's really an educational experience that they put on," Jacobson said. "I'm honestly very happy just supporting that."

Norah Khan, co-president of the Middlebury College Democrats, reflected on how she typically spends election nights.

"I usually hang out with my parents in my room refreshing the New York Times stats, like, every five minutes, because I've found that trying to sleep is futile. But now, I'm away from home, so I'm hopefully going to be surrounded by friends," Khan said.

This feeling of community is a priority for those organizing political events on campus this semester.

These events drew the attention of both American and international students. Leah Micklewright, a South African native and an exchange student from the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, has attended both debates and plans to attend the CNN coverage screening on the night of the election. Micklewright, who has attended both live debate screenings so far, reflected on her active engagement with these events.

"Out of personal interest, looking at the candidates and seeing where they stand is very interesting. My cousins are American, so I like just being able to understand and having a foot in the door when it comes to speaking about it," Micklewright said.

Election night watch parties are a long-running tradition at Middlebury, according to Johnson.

"Me and Matt [Dickinson] did it in 2004 — I can remember the night. We've done it basically the same in the years since, although the technology has gotten a lot better," Johnson said.

The event will start at 7 p.m., and go until the hosts and audience are kicked out of the building around 11:30 p.m, according to Johnson.

Dickinson, however, will be needed elsewhere — Johnson said that his colleague will be providing punditry on the local television station WXAC. He did the same in 2022.

Many students have more personal traditions for election night.

Jacobson likes to watch the election night coverage with a slice of pizza. Daniza Tazabekova '26, president of MiddVotes, described her own routine.

"A personal ritual I've developed over the years is collecting 'I Voted' stickers. I want to create an 'I Voted' sticker book to memorialize my record of citizenship," she wrote in an email to The Campus.

Whether students are far from home or still right here, traditions like these can be a fun way for students to personalize their engagement with upcoming the election.

Editor's Note: Norah Khan '27 is an Arts & Culture editor for The Campus.

COURTESY PHOTO/ DANIZA TAZABEKOVA
Students gathered in Wilson Hall to watch the Vice Presidential Debate.

International students hold their breath as American classmates cast their votes

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during Trump's administration that affected the career trajectories of students currently or planning to study abroad in the U.S.

"I'm worrying immigration laws will become much stricter overnight if Trump returns to the White House," she said. "Trump often attempted to limit legal immigrants, OPT and H1-B visas."

OPT, meaning Optional Practical Training, is a benefit that comes with a foreign student's F-1 visa that allows international students to work in the U.S. for one to three years after graduation while they pursue an H-1B visa, a work visa with a maximum duration of six years.

Former President Trump also signed Proclamation 10043, which restricts students from certain Chinese universities and STEM fields from obtaining a student visa. Although the proclamation has not yet prevented Chinese undergraduate students from studying in the U.S., the worsening U.S.-China relations continue to prompt questions about the future of international students in the U.S.

Xu expressed concern about her plans to study abroad: She is studying French at Middlebury and hopes to spend a year abroad at the college's schools in Paris and Yaoundé, Cameroon for unique cultural immersion experiences. However, recent changes by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) limit international students to study abroad for no more than five months. According to the USCIS website, staying overseas for longer requires students to apply for a new Form I-20, the discontinuation of which could affect their standing in applying to remain in the U.S. Because of this, Xu said she might need to rethink her plans if the new government maintains this policy.

"I'm also concerned that my study abroad plan will have to be changed due to the recent policy adjustment by USCIS," Xu told The Campus. "Those study abroad programs were one of the main reasons why I chose Midd as my ED1 choice."

The U.S. election is also under the international spotlight this year due to its significant impact on global politics.

Anastasiia Demchenko '28, a Ukrainian citizen, believes the U.S. election outcome will be crucial in shaping the course of events in Ukraine, as the country remains heavily dependent on aid from the U.S. and Europe to stay afloat in the ongoing war.

"We weren't entirely satisfied with Biden's policies on the war, as we're still not allowed to strike back on Russian territory, and the quantity of military aid and the time it took to deliver it to Ukraine were questionable," Demchenko wrote in an email to The Campus, adding that targeting Russian military bases is essential for Ukraine's defense. "Still, Democrats (both under Biden and Harris) are fairly predictable in their generally pro-Ukrainian stance."

Demchenko feels that if Trump were to return to the White House, the situation in Ukraine would be far more unpredictable, given his lack of a clear pro-Ukrainian position.

"[Trump's] statements like 'I will end the war in Ukraine in one day' sound to me like, 'I'm going to give Ukrainian territories to Russia,'" Demchenko wrote, questioning Trump's stance on NATO and European security. "[Trump said] 'The U.S. won't protect countries that don't contribute enough to NATO's budget,' which undermines European security overall and grants Russia a lot of unchecked power."

While Demchenko doesn't expect a change in the administration to improve the situation in Ukraine immediately, she feels that with a Democratic administration in control things will likely be more stable.

Given the ongoing war in Gaza and severe situations in the Middle East, Yahya Rahhawi '26 from Iraq believes that the election outcome will determine the U.S.'s further presence in these conflicts.

"As someone who has experienced the impact of Donald Trump's foreign policies in the Middle East, I believe that if he wins a second term, he may indeed push for a ceasefire, though likely as a short-term measure," Rahhawi wrote to The Campus. "It's likely he would expedite an end to U.S. involvement."

However, Rahhawi also mentioned that Trump may not be able to achieve genuine justice or address the longstanding oppression faced by Palestinians.

"However, considering Trump's alignment with Israel, he might also assist them in achieving their immediate goals," he pointed out. "His support for Israel's far-right government could enable further settlements, not only in the West Bank but potentially in Gaza and even southern Lebanon."

Rahhawi rejected the idea posed by some news analysis that Harris has shown more solidarity with Palestinians.

"I don't believe Harris has shown genuine empathy; at most, it seems like pity," he wrote.

"True empathy involves action, and so far, we've seen little from the Biden administration to alleviate the suffering and destruction endured by civilians in Gaza," he emphasized. "As president, she might temporarily slow weapons sales to Israel, but it's unlikely she would make any substantial efforts toward justice or accountability for actions taken by the Israeli government."

Rach Peck '25 belongs to a subgroup of international students: She holds dual U.K.-US citizenship, which enables her to cast a ballot on Nov. 5. However, the election anxiety has extended to another facet of Peck's life — whether or not to stay in the U.S. after graduation.

"You get asked all the time what you want to do after college," Peck explained, "and one thing that I've been saying is that I'm waiting until November to see."

She added that the climate in the U.K. has shifted recently following the end of 14 years of Tory control over the summer by the Labour Party's victory, which has also influenced her decision. Still, Peck expressed uncertainty about what to do even in the event of a Trump victory.

"I have some sense that if Trump wins, it's not forever," Peck said. "It gives me a perspective to not feel like everything will be terrible if Trump wins, because hopefully it's just four years. "

Rachel Lafferty '25 is an Irish citizen, but since she has spent most of her life in the U.S., she has never been able to vote in either country, despite having no shortage of political opinions.

"It's sort of a weird no-man's land," Lafferty said. "I think it makes it harder to connect with people as well — there's definitely a social component to it."

Lafferty said she feels lucky to have spent her time in the U.S. in states that tend to vote blue, which match her political views.

"I'm lucky to be living in two blue states — I don't have to be worrying about reproductive rights, whereas if I was living in Texas and not able to vote, that would be incredibly difficult. I feel pretty privileged in that way," she said.

She wants to encourage people who can vote to do so, adding that U.S. citizens should remember that there are many people who wish they could.

"We're still directly affected by these things and don't have a say in it," she said.

Editor's Note: Editor in Chief Ryan McElroy '25, News Editor Evan Weiss '25 and Managing Editor Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

ESTHER CHARLESTIN CHALLENGES INCUMBENT PHIL SCOTT AS HE SEEKS FIFTH TERM AS GOVERNOR

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where everyone can get involved and address the challenges that Vermont faces," Charlestin said.

Vermont's Housing Crisis

The Vermont Housing Needs Assessment for 2025 through 2029 reports a severe shortage of affordable housing in Vermont, a situation worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, half of Vermont renters are cost-burdened, with about a quarter paying over 50% of their income on housing. Since 2017, demand for housing has surged, and with an unemployment rate of just 2.2%, thousands of essential jobs remain unfilled due to high housing costs. The assessment also found that Vermont has the second-highest rate of homelessness in the nation, which exacerbates already high stresses placed on housing infrastructure, especially public organizations which temporarily house the homeless.

According to a report by VTDigger from August, Vermont needs at least 24,000 new homes in the next five years to meet projected demand.

Affordable housing is a top priority for Charlestin, who emphasizes its ability to foster inclusive communities among state residents of all income levels and backgrounds, according to her campaign website.

"Housing, housing, housing: We need affordable housing," Charlestin said when asked about her housing policies. "We need to work with the local municipalities and revise some zoning laws in order to make sure there can be new construction."

"This is a humanitarian issue, and no person should be in this position," she added. "Initiatives such as the Lamoille Community House shelter facility are things I would want to support."

In the VTDigger debate, Charlestin repeated this emphasis on building housing. "My administration would focus on that [construction], not only in the urban areas, but also in rural areas as well," she said.

Scott expressed support for more deregulation reform for housing and construction, and he voiced his opposition to Charlestin's policies during the debate regarding a recent law that amended Vermont's primary land use legislation, Act 250. Scott had vetoed the bill in June, arguing that it prioritized conservation at the expense of rural development and errantly extended Act 250's ecological protections.

Homelessness also has risen in the state under Scott's tenure. The Vermont Hotel-Motel Program, established during the incumbent state administration, has provided temporary shelter for vulnerable Vermonters experiencing homelessness, especially during the cold winter months. However, due to rising costs, the program has been scaled back, reducing the number of available rooms and tightening eligibility requirements, according to VTDigger.

In the VTDigger debate, Scott explained his belief that the program should only serve as a form of social safety-netting.

"The hotel motel program was never meant to be a long term housing solution because it is not good for the people in it," Scott said.

Another program Scott's administration has been developing and hopes to continue is the Manufactured Home Improvement and Repair Program. Scott added in the debate that he hopes to have 100 homes completed by the end of next year.

Flood Relief

In recent summers, Vermont has experienced an increase in flooding, a trend some expect to continue in the coming years.

During the VTDigger debate, both Charlestin and Scott acknowledged that environmental damage due to climate change is real, but their approaches to addressing the flooding in Vermont differ.

One of Charlestin's top priorities is building climate-resilient communities.

"More needs to be done in order to fight climate change and the effects it has on Vermonters," Charlestin told The Campus. "I want to increase watershed resilience by restoring wetlands."

In her policy platform, Charlestin also hopes to support promoting sustainable land use and managing stormwater runoff to further support watershed resiliency.

Scott asserted in the VTDigger debate that there is no one specific answer to managing flooding in Vermont.

"Whether you are going to advocate for the buyout and move out of your home and put that back into the green space or going to be able to harden that [house] from us [State government] there is no single answer," Scott said.

Charlestin has been endorsed by former Governor Howard Dean and Congresswoman Becca Balint. Governor Scott is endorsed by former Governor and Middlebury Executive-in-Residence Jim Douglas and former Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie.

If elected, Esther Charlestin would become the first Black woman to hold the gubernatorial seat in Vermont. If reelected, Scott would tie with Governor Dean with the most terms served in the state.

INCUMBENT LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR SEEKS TO FEND OFF REPUBLICAN CHALLENGER

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record of supporting progressive causes, such as environmental initiatives and reproductive rights, and Vermont's agricultural community.

"I saw Bernie [Sanders] in 1992 when he was up for Congress, that was as a college student. I became quite intrigued by this different type of politician who doesn't take corporate money and who seemed to speak more directly to the issues. I was very inspired by that and got involved in his campaign in '92It sort of all took off from there," Zuckerman said of his involvement in politics.

On the other side, John Rodgers, a former Democratic legislator who recently switched to the Republican Party, is fiscally conservative and skeptical of Vermont's recent progressive shift. Born and raised in Vermont, Rodgers has built a platform focused on lowering taxes and challenging recent Democratic-pushed policies on energy and public education funding.

Known for his vocal criticism of the national Republican Party's Trump-aligned faction, Rodgers presents himself as a moderate alternative, willing to cross party lines and address the economic concerns of Vermont's working class.

"I really want to be a voice for the working class. I believe their voice has been lost in the state house and I really want to bring that back to the state house," Rodgers said in a recent VTDigger debate.

Affordability and Housing in Vermont

Zuckerman and Rodgers agree that the cost of living in Vermont has become untenable for Vermont's working class, but have put forth very different solutions to address the issue. Along with the general cost of living, the cost of housing in Vermont has skyrocketed in recent years, largely due to rising property taxes and increasing housing costs.

VTDigger reported that just this past July, the Vermont Legislature voted to override Gov. Phil Scott's veto of H.887, known as the "yield bill," which finances the state's public education system through property taxes. This decision will affect property owners across the state, resulting in an average property tax increase of 13.8%, according to VTDigger. Rodgers and Zuckerman both believe that one of the first steps to addressing these issues is raising the minimum wage in Vermont, which currently is $13.67 per hour.

During their Vermont Public debate, Rodger explained that he views Vermont's property taxes and current energy policies as regressive, disproportionately affecting lower-income Vermonters without providing sufficient relief. He is particularly critical of energy policies that he says benefit wealthier residents while shifting more financial pressure onto working families who are ineligible for energy rebates and tax relief.

Rodgers has proposed reforms to ensure all Vermonters contribute fairly to state revenue. In the same Vermont Public debate, he even suggested he might support a tax on high earning Vermonters to alleviate the current system's impact on middle- and lower-income residents, and shift a portion of the tax burden onto higher earners. By reforming both taxation and energy policies, Rodgers hopes to create a more equitable economic landscape in Vermont.

"People I've been talking with around the state are seeing crushing rents, spiraling property taxes, and other expenses going up beyond their means to pay. I think the legislature has forgotten them and I think they often listen to special interests and talk to each other and aren't communicating with real Vermonters on the ground," Rodgers said in the VTDigger debate.

In an interview with the Campus, Zuckerman explained his support of a 3% marginal tax increase on those earning more than $500,000 annually, aimed at generating revenue for housing and school initiatives. This tax increase, he argued, would ensure Vermont's wealthiest residents contribute more to the state's infrastructure, which is especially vital for lower-income residents who bear the brunt of Vermont's high cost of living.

Zuckerman has proposed allocating the $70 million generated by this tax toward affordable housing — a plan that is not supported by Vermont's governor. He also advocates for an additional $30–40 million to improve funding for public schools, raised by a proposed shift in income sensitivity regarding school taxes. He stresses the interconnectivity of Vermont's issues; addressing the cost of living issue could also help alleviate the pressure on Vermont's healthcare system as well as bolster Vermont education.

The candidates share concerns about Vermont's rising housing and homelessness issues but propose slightly different approaches to address them. Zuckerman proposed the same 3% marginal tax increase for the wealthiest Vermonters in a recent VTDigger debate. While Rogers is concerned about the rising costs of living that additional taxes may bring, he recognizes the need to fund services that alleviate housing insecurity without over burdening any one city or community.

COURTESY PHOTO / JOHN RODGERS

Republican challenger John Rodgers poses with current Gov. Phil Scott.

Healthcare

In their final debate, Zuckerman and Rodgers discussed healthcare, reflecting their differing priorities for affordability and feasibility. Rodgers argues that Vermont cannot bear the financial weight of a universal healthcare system on its own and insists that federal intervention is necessary to make such a system viable.

Zuckerman, however, is a strong advocate for universal healthcare within Vermont. He supports lowering drug prices and believes that the state's high healthcare costs make reform essential. Acknowledging Vermont's aging population, he sees primary care investments as a positive step but argues that an expert-led overhaul is needed to build a sustainable system.

Lieutenant Governor Zuckerman and John Rodgers largely agree on what issues need Vermont's attention — they just have differing opinions on how to get there.

Zuckerman advocates for progressive changes, including raising the minimum wage, expanding affordable housing, tackling the opioid crisis, and addressing climate change. He highlights the need to combat class inequality and draws attention to his record in the Vermont Senate, where he championed initiatives like marriage equality and cannabis reform.

Rodgers, meanwhile, underscores his decision to leave the Democratic Party as an act of courage, positioning himself as a voice for Vermont's working class. Both candidates aim to demonstrate their dedication to Vermont's residents, with Zuckerman focusing on progressive reform and Rodgers on pragmatic, working-class advocacy.

Both candidates do not support access to automatic weapons in Vermont.

Lt. Governor Zuckerman emphasized to The Campus the importance of voting on a local as well as federal level.

"Those local votes matter when it comes to river corridor protection to protect from flooding, or renewable energy, or investing in affordable housing. I would encourage people to not skip the down ballot races," he said.

COURTESY PHOTO /DAVID ZUCKERMAN

David Zuckerman was elected lieutenant governer in 2022.

"He's a little too old": students reflect on Sen. Bernie Sanders

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Contributing Writer

Sen. Bernard Sanders, better known as Bernie Sanders, will be seeking his fourth term in the Senate this election cycle. In light of his rapid ascension to political fame following his 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, Sanders has left an indelible mark upon American politics — and, it seems, the Middlebury student body.

To some, he's a boundary pusher. To others, simultaneously an octogenarian and an icon for Gen Z. An institution of the Green Mountain State, even, to some native Vermonters.

"He's an important figure but he's aging too much and needs to retire," said Malachi Shiffer-Delegard '26.

Anna Armstrong '28 agreed with Shiffer-Delegard, pointing out his age.

"I think he's a little too old at this point," Armstrong said.

Sanders is running against Republican Gerald Malloy this year. Malloy, an Army veteran and former defense contractor, has emphasized unity and his ability to contribute something new for Vermonters in his campaign statements. The Republican candidate previously ran unsuccessfully in the 2022 General Election against Democrat Peter Welch.

Sanders held his first office in 1981 when he was elected as the mayor of Burlington, where he served three terms before being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1990. Sanders held the position until 2006, when he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He has been reelected twice and is now campaigning for a fourth term in the upcoming election. Sanders has also made considerable attempts to gain the Democratic presidential nomination in the past two Democratic primary cycles, in which he finished second behind Hillary Clinton and then Joe Biden, respectively.

There is merit to the concerns about Sanders' age. Sanders is 83 years old and has been a member of the Senate before some current Middlebury students were even born. Were Sanders to win reelection, he would be 89 by the end of his term.

Concerns about candidates' ages have been a prominent theme this election season, with the most notable outcry coming after Biden's especially poor performance in the first presidential debate between him and former President Donald Trump in late June. Many onlookers attributed this performance to his 81 years of age.

How Bernie responds to the uncertainty about his own age remains to be seen, but regardless, his unique character and popular culture image are clear assets in his bid for reelection.

Whether described as a "meme," "celebrity" or just a "funny guy," another common sentiment students seemed to share about Bernie was his prominence of character. For most, the mention of his name evokes the famous image of Sanders sitting at President Biden's inauguration, bundled up and in a mask, arms and legs folded, wearing now-famous knitted mittens. Some recalled the slightly older meme taken from a campaign advertisement, in which Sanders makes the famous request: "I am once again asking for your financial support."

Others just view Sanders as the quintessential Vermont senator, a man who had his own Ben & Jerry's flavor and once lived in a town of less than 100 residents in the Northeast Kingdom. Regardless of one's view of Bernie, it is clear that he has etched out a distinct reputation in both statewide and national politics.

COURTESY PHOTO / HAYDN SUSKE-FUNK
Opinions Editor Haydn Suske-Funk ran into Sen. Bernie Sanders at the Burlington Airport.

WHITE HOUSE / ADAM SCHULTZ
Senator Bernie Sanders and President Joe Biden in the White House.

However, Sanders' presence in popular culture has shifted the focus away from his politics. Few students mentioned his policies as a senator, and even fewer were aware of his previous tenure as Mayor of Burlington and Vermont's U.S. Representative. Nevertheless, most acknowledged his progressive ideology and the difficulty Sanders faces in reaching Americans as an independent who identifies as a democratic socialist.

"He's not gonna get his goals, but he can push the boundaries," Ben Conigliaro '26 said. "[Sanders has kept] both left and right honest on where they stand."

This reflects the realities of being an independent, progressive politician like Sanders. He is often grouped with the Democrats on the national scale, but within the party, his legacy primarily consists of his progressive influence and ability to nudge the party's ideology further left.

Regardless of the balance between age concerns, popular culture connotations, or policy success, however, the odds are heavily in Bernie's favor this November. Professor of Political Science Matthew Dickinson emphasized the historical advantage incumbents have in senatorial races, explaining that "roughly 85% of incumbents who run for reelection win."

"It's particularly hard to defeat one who is as popular as Sanders is, in a state that is so disproportionately leaning in one direction. So [Malloy] has his work cut out for him," Dickinson added.

ADDISON COUNTY SENATORS FACE CHALLENGERS IN RACE FOR VERMONT LEGISLATURE

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Hardy is seeking her fourth term in the Vermont Senate, where she currently serves on the Health and Welfare Committee, the Canvassing Committee — a subgroup of the Senate tasked with tallying votes for statewide positions — and the Judicial Retention Committee. She also serves as the chair for the Committee on Government Operations. Prior to serving in the State Senate, Hardy ran Emerge Vermont, an organization dedicated to preparing women to run for political office.

Hardy explained her motivations for running for a state senator position in an interview with The Campus.

"One of the reasons I ran for the State Senate was because I wanted to make sure our state was a good place for our children," Hardy said. "What drives me is how can I make sure we're enacting policies in support of families, young Vermonters and seniors."

After surveying Vermonters across the county and the state, Hardy has chosen to focus her campaign on issues of affordability in many areas, including healthcare, childcare and education according to her campaign website.

Bray is running for his sixth term in the Vermont Senate, where he is currently the chair of the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee, while also serving on the Senate Finance Committee, Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules and the Joint Carbon Reduction Committee.

"There are many pressing issues for the next legislature to address; they include education; affordable housing; economic development; an aging population; affordable health care; mental health care and substance abuse treatment," Bray said in a candidate statement to the Addison Independent in August.

The primary focal points of his campaign, however, are climate change and environmental action. In his statement to the Addison Independent, Bray explained that climate change is already proving significantly expensive for Vermont residents, and that if he were elected to his sixth term, he would continue to work towards more affordable and accessible clean energy sources.

Landel Cochran, who is seeking his first term in the State Senate, has been a member of the Huntington, Vt. Selectboard since 2018.

Cochran spoke with The Campus about what he sees the primary issue of this campaign season to be: affordability.

"Affordability is definitely the number one issue in this campaign season, and it's the issue that dragged me into this race here. I've been happy serving in local government for the past seven years or so, and seeing what the legislature did with the tax increases this year, I knew I'd stand up and do something about it," Cochran said.

He also mentioned concerns about Vermont's healthcare system, describing how insurance companies are slowly leaving the market and forcing continuous yearly rate hikes.

"We're seeing unsustainable year over year rate increases, and we're seeing insurance providers leave the market, and we're getting dangerously close to no one wanting to play in Vermont, and no insurance providers wanting to participate," Cochran explained.

The Republican candidate stressed that while he admires Hardy and Bray, he felt compelled to act for Vermont families affected by the legislature repeatedly overriding Gov. Phil Scott's vetoes.

"I know that our senators are good people. I know that they work hard, but I think the strategy that we've seen specifically in the last two years has crossed the line. There is a lot to look up to with the incumbent senators and some of the work that they've done, but we need results that don't clobber Vermont families the way that they did this year," Cochran said.

The other Republican challenger to the two incumbents is Steven Heffernan.

Issues important to this election cycle include climate change — especially as it relates to community disasters like flooding in the state — affordable housing and education. On Oct. 10, the candidates had the opportunity to debate each other on these issues in a town hall in Bristol, Vt.

Hardy reminded students that voting is crucial for community engagement, and that in the state of Vermont, students can register on election day at the town clerk's office, using their Middlebury IDs as their form of identification.

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Cole Chaudhari '26 contributed reporting to this article.

COURTESY PHOTOS
From left to right: Addison County Senator Ruth Hardy, Republican Canidate Landel Cochran, Republican Canidate Steven Heffernan and Senator Christopher Bray.

NAVIGATING NOV. 5: A REFLECTION ON THE ELECTION

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

On Nov. 5, many of us will be casting ballots for the first time to determine the next president of the United States. In keeping with our special election issue for this week, we discussed the presence of the election and this tumultuous period of American politics in our personal lives and here on campus, and what we as young, college-educated voters can do about it.

College students — especially at an institution like Middlebury, where the student body is comprised of members from all 50 states and many foreign countries — have the weight of their electoral power distributed somewhat unevenly. The decision to vote via absentee ballot in one's home state or to vote in Vermont determines how effectively the vote of any one student can counter or corroborate that state's political allegiances. A Harris voter from Georgia can have more impact by requesting and using an absentee ballot than by registering to vote in Middlebury on Tuesday morning.

While some from "blue" states like California or New York feel comfortable with the knowledge that their Democratic will be another drop in the bucket, many of our friends from swing states must grapple with the relative efficacy of their votes in a system that deprioritizes the popular vote. Because of the electoral college, some students' votes truly do mean more than others.

The board broadly agreed that, no matter who you intend to vote for, it is impossible to experience this election without feeling it urgently and incessantly. Both Vice President Harris and former President Trump have, in recent months, swung the thrust of their campaign's efforts towards the ears and minds of Gen Z. These efforts have included appearing on podcasts popular with Zoomers, stylizing their social media presences to cohere within contemporary meme cultures, increasing their output of content on platforms like Instagram and X, and emphasizing the role of young voters in this election.

The vast majority of us grew into our political consciousnesses as Donald Trump began his first march to and through the White House, and so for our teenage and young adult lives, all of American politics has seemed tense, fragile and highly flammable. In that sense, the rhetoric of this election is, at least, not unfamiliar to us.

While Middlebury can feel — and, in some ways, very much is — a liberal bubble, we must remember that our school, the state it is situated in, and the larger U.S. contain individuals with a diverse range of political opinions, who could be affected dramatically by the results of this election. Not only this, but Middlebury students come from states and homes with drastically different political environments; a student headed home for Thanksgiving to conservative family and community in Alabama will inevitably be forced to interact with this election's result differently from someone returning to a liberal family in Massachusetts.

College campuses are widely considered to be progressive spaces, and Middlebury certainly postures itself as a rustic New England enclave replete with amenities like thrift stores, hipster cafés, and that one church with a pride flag. Perhaps this influences our perception of U.S. politics; it may be difficult to understand other parts of the country when we live in a community that overwhelmingly supports Democrats.

We also want to reflect on the nature of Middlebury as a bubble within a bubble — since political lines are increasingly drawn by educational status, college campuses have become more and more associated with liberal politics. Some students may feel they are surrounded by a thick blanket of like-minded opinions, but this may ultimately block out the perspectives of others not included in higher education, such as working-class Americans who are increasingly moving towards the Republican Party. While this does not discount our perspective nor invalidates Middlebury's left-leaning tendencies, it is worth acknowledging that our experience here is not necessarily representative of the average American in 2024.

We do not know what the future holds, or what sounds will carry the day the results of the 2024 Presidential Election are announced, but we should seek solace in what we know of ourselves as students. We know how to track down knowledge — the decent, rough sort that reveals itself only after searching through many haystacks. We know how to remain skeptical, yet practical, when it comes to navigating politics, at least while we learn how to tinker with and tune it to better fit the needs of our whole global community of beings. No one knows yet how to properly weigh the present against the future.

With so much uncertainty in the air this week, it is difficult to find some kind of resolution to our election anxieties other than voting. Before you turn on CNN on Nov. 5 and start obsessively refreshing The New York Times' Needle, take some time this week to breathe, enjoy the last moments of beautiful autumn weather and send off your absentee ballot or make a plan to vote in person.

CAN THE LEFT RE-EMBRACE PATRIOTISM WITHOUT LOSING ITS SOUL?

Letter to the Editor

Delphine Wu *is a member of the class of 2028.*

"A patriotic society can, and must, co-exist with a liberal and forward-thinking population." I was surprised to find such a statement on Thursday after my IGST 101 lecture where I can conveniently grab an issue of The Campus leaving the auditorium. To me, such an op-ed provided an overgeneralizing description of the leftist perspective on national identity. Quite on the contrary, I believe that the recent usage of patriotism as compromising propaganda for left-wing parties is what manifested its frictions with left-wing ideologies.

Distinguishing between the two is important, as the ideological perspective provides a valuable argument against the rather pragmatic one presented by the author regarding the Starmer campaign of 2024. Can Starmer represent the left simply due to his leadership of the Labour Party? A similar question can be raised towards former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's premiership in the 2000s. In hindsight, his departure from the historical position of the Labour Party was regarded as a strategy to appeal to moderate voters rather than a mere revision of a continuously left-wing political stance. Similar trends could be seen in the 2024 U.K. general election where, compared with the 2019 election, the Labour Party gained support from voters with higher social grades as categorized by the National Readership Survey (NRS) who traditionally favor the Tories.

Thus raised the question: How did Starmer's stance appeal to moderate voters? I came to the conclusion that the patriotic ideals held by his campaign were used as a tool of political stabilization that would only be effective if it conflicts with and dilutes the left-wing ideologies of the Labour Party. It is true that such a strategy led the party to a historic victory, just as how Friedrich Ebert led the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to its first triumph in 1918 while allying with the nationalists and suppressing left-wing activities. On the other hand, the author's reference to the "muted, and often unfortunate" reactions of the leftist population might still indicate that a party could not be inherently left-winged simply due to its name.

I do not believe that the acceptance of patriotism may maintain the long term progressivism of left-wing parties as well. Patriotism that works as a stabilizing measure to appeal to moderate voters at the expense of the longstanding left-wing attitudes could hardly be beneficial in the long term. This can also be generalized to the case in the Kenyan Independence movement, where the author claims that patriotism was seen as "the vessel by which we [the author] fought for independence before 1963." As a vessel, patriotism serves to promote solidarity that may facilitate liberals on the way toward their goals. However, the nature that allowed it to unite the masses has shown its neutralizing force against the more progressive and emancipatory ideals.

Another questionable rebuttal towards the separation of progressivism and patriotism was given on the ground that nation-states form the basis of modern politics. While this is true, I found somewhat contentious the projection that such a system would generally remain fixed "throughout our entire lives." To me, a successful change in society could only be made in practice after a widespread challenge of the traditional approach in principle; not to mention that influential ideological systems that suggested alternatives to the national identity, such as Marxism, have been formed centuries ago. Henceforth, I do not accept the argument against being idealistic under such an ideological context, especially when it comes to a progress that, despite setbacks in the past decades, have already significantly changed the world.

Vladimir Lenin once addressed similar arguments in a rather acute way: "All the social-chauvinists are now 'Marxists' (don't laugh!). And more and more frequently German bourgeois scholars, only yesterday specialists in the annihilation of Marxism, are speaking of the 'national-German' Marx [...]!" While his perspective is certainly debatable, it reminds us to consider the implications of patriotism within left-wing philosophies. Patriotism can be a convenient way of gaining support, but we risk having the core of progressive and liberal ideals forgotten equally conveniently if we cross the line too far.

A CONVERSATION WITH AN UNDECIDED VOTER IN WISCONSIN

Op-Ed

Haydn Suske-Funk *is a member of the class of 2024.5 and an Opinions Editor.*

All across middle America, a handful of undecided voters will decide the fate of the most consequential election of our lifetimes. My friend Jordan is one of those voters. Jordan is 21 years old, lives in northern Wisconsin and is the proud owner of a small marine service business which he started after graduating high school. He identifies as conservative, but is open-minded and does not feel bound to any political party. I know him to be an upstanding member of his community, a hardworking guy and a loyal friend.

By writing this rather unconventional opinion piece, I am working to uphold The Campus's mission of airing a diverse range of opinions — a range which I feel is somewhat limited given the predominance of left-leaning voices among Middlebury's student body. In times when the country is so divided, it is important not to vilify those with contrasting political views, and to instead encourage thought-provoking discourse on important issues. Let's take a moment to tune out the mainstream narrative and listen to the nuanced perspective of people like Jordan, who are grappling with genuine uncertainty and a daunting civic task on Nov. 5.

Haydn Suske-Funk: Does character matter to you in a president?
Jordan: It does matter, and voting based on character, I would vote for Kamala. I think Trump is a corrupt businessman, and that everyone would have a hard time voting for Trump when it comes to his questionable behavior.
HSF: What is the most important issue for you in this year's election?
Jordan: The most important issue for me is the economy, followed by the environment. An issue that I wish was discussed more is the influence of Big Pharma and big industry. That's why I was interested in Robert F. Kennedy [Jr.] (RFK) — transparency is important to me.
HSF: What is your biggest issue with Kamala Harris? Do you think her policy proposals are concrete?
Jordan: I don't think she cheated her way into candidacy; that being said, it doesn't sit well with me that she breezed through the nominating process at the DNC. Until his poor performance in the debate, I was ready to support Biden in the general election. But Kamala's rise to power felt undemocratic, untrustworthy and poorly handled.
As far as policy goes, I like her border policy. It's more comprehensive and doesn't include massive deportations. However, I dislike some of her economic policies, like her $50,000 business startup tax credit. As a business owner, that money would be helpful, but too many people would take advantage of it, and I worry that it would blow up the deficit. Same with her $25,000 credit to new homebuyers — that would just increase home prices by $25,000. I think it's designed to appeal to uneducated voters. In my book, there's no such thing as free money.
HSF: Donald Trump has been endorsed by RFK Jr., and has made appearances on podcasts like The Joe Rogan Experience that have a young, male audience. Do you feel like he's reaching out to voters like you?
Jordan: The RFK endorsement meant a lot to me. He reached out to Kamala's campaign to offer his endorsement, and they turned him down. Trump alludes to RFK being a part of his cabinet, and I like that. I also think that RFK would go against the grain and speak his mind. Maybe he would keep Trump in check. This isn't the first time Trump has reached out to a young, male audience. He's appeared on Theo Von and other podcasts that would skew towards young, conservative men. I'd like to see Kamala do the same — that would be a gamechanger for me. Voters in my demographic don't feel like they know Kamala Harris. To some, she seems like a puppet, a clown. Frankly, her lack of appearances concerns me.
HSF: Anything you'd like to say to a liberal college audience?
Jordan: Look at the last three and a half years. Look at Biden's America. I know that a lot of people can be blamed, but the reality is that Americans are concerned about the country's economic direction. Trump's strongest points in an otherwise abysmal debate performance were his economic proposals. I strongly believe that Trump's pre-pandemic economy would have placed us in a better position than we are now. The revenue that would have been generated from tariffs and increased business (in spite of lower taxes) would have been used to reduce the deficit. Trump's presidency deserves a more objective look. If you are a confident voter, and you believe that the election choice is crystal clear, you have more research to do.
HSF: Lastly, do you plan to vote in this election? If so, for whom?
Jordan: I will vote, although I would rather not, given the choices I am presented with. That is my duty as a citizen — to maintain my role in the democratic process. I have not decided on who I'm voting for; I'll be taking in every last piece of news and context until Nov. 5. I want to keep an open mind until the last minute.

I think it is important to acknowledge that many in the Middlebury community have a superiority complex when they talk about swing voters from middle America; clearly, Jordan has attempted to do his research and now faces the unenviable job of aligning his personal values with imperfect candidates. Although I disagree with many of Jordan's opinions, I respect that he is trying to do what is right for himself, his business and his country.

I encourage you to reach out to friends and family that do not share your political opinions — we can't fix America's problems by remaining in ideological bubbles. Instead of immediately disparaging people that we disagree with, let's challenge ourselves to listen, and to learn. Our nation's quest for a more perfect union depends on it.

Editor's Note: This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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A CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE ON ELECTION DAY

Op-Ed

Jeffrey Teh *is a member of the class of 2028.*

From collecting petition signatures for a new fire station to calling my representative in Congress, political participation has been a tradition in my family for as long as I can remember. Voting in every special, midterm and presidential election has become a given. But this year, things are different. The choice for me should be simple: I'm a Democratic National Convention (DNC) delegate who has helped elect progressive candidates up and down the ballot my entire life. Why would I have any doubts about filling in a circle next to Kamala Harris and other Democrats' names?

Because these are no ordinary times.

While failing to address our inundated asylum system or the looming federal deficit, American policymakers have instead worked overtime to preserve the pipeline of weapons sales to Israel. The DNC refused to invite a Palestinian speaker onstage to speak at the convention, and the Harris-Walz campaign has largely avoided an overt policy shift on the wars in Gaza and Lebanon. I'd guess that if you ask a member of the Political Science faculty at Middlebury, they'll tell you this makes perfect sense. A plurality of Americans support American military aid to Israel and I believe no major party candidate with a desire to win would ever seriously consider supporting an arms embargo.

This bipartisan intransigence leaves many young people like me with a crisis of conscience. Do I have to compromise my morals in voting for a candidate whose publicly stated policy violates one of my fundamental beliefs? Is supporting a third-party candidate "throwing my vote away"? Is not voting even worse?

Let's assess the alternatives. If I don't fill in the circle next to Kamala Harris on my ballot, who else would I vote for? Jill Stein and Cornel West have both campaigned on the Biden-Harris administration's complicity in the suffering in Gaza, but they have no political experience nor legitimate chance at victory. Donald Trump has made grand promises to bring historic peace to the Middle East, but his administration withdrew from the United Nations Human Rights Council and legitimized illegal settlements in the West Bank. Simply put, Kamala Harris is the only palatable choice on a largely unappetizing menu.

It's critical to consider what refusing to vote entirely or in a specific race means for political representation. In such tight races from the presidential to the local level, with gun control, Gaza, climate change, and abortion on the ballot, relinquishing your say over who represents you and your values is tantamount to letting others determine how the government influences your life. Refusing to vote is the ultimate sign you've lost faith in the political system. You no longer trust the people who represent you, but you also no longer believe in the government to tackle the issues you care about the most. Voting at all — even writing in yourself — is better than abdicating some of the only political agency you have left. If you have even the slightest glimmer of hope that your government can make progress on the causes you care about, you ought to use your vote to choose who represents you.

COURTESY PHOTO / JEFFREY TEH

The moral quandary we face is not so much about whether to vote or who to choose. Instead, it's with ourselves — whether we are comfortable with compromise in an imperfect world or if we are so disillusioned with the system that we refuse to participate entirely. In all likelihood, your abstention may cause more guilt than your unpalatable choice.

Here at Middlebury, I know we believe in justice for the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank. I know we believe in taking action on climate change, which poses an existential threat to us all. I know we believe in a world where the voices of young people are heard in the halls of power.

Achieving those goals though, takes more than protests, op-eds or even college divestment from arms manufacturing and fossil fuels — it takes action from the policymakers who represent you. If you still have hope that the U.S. government can stop selling arms to Israel, invest in renewable energy over fossil fuels, or improve the lives of everyday Americans, use your voice by voting on Nov. 5. Your conscience will thank you.

STOP GETTING YOUR POLITICAL NEWS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Op-Ed

Violet Wexler *is a member of the class of 2028.*

When I open my Instagram, I'm instantly reminded of the election. Whether it's candidate advertisements, reposted information or celebrity endorsements, my feed is flooded with politics. Especially around election time, political content can often appear on your phone regardless of your interests or identity. Since political messages are ubiquitous in our social media feeds, we must ensure we engage with them responsibly and understand their dangers.

While we often discuss the positive role social media can play in spreading voting information, we must also consider the negative aspects, including misinformation, the influence of celebrities and influencers, and the impact of algorithms. Social media poses a severe threat to democracy, and it can prevent elections from being fair and accessible.

Perhaps the most frequently discussed danger of social media is misinformation. Researchers at MIT found that fake news can spread up to 10 times faster than legitimate news on social media. And yet, according to The New York Times, nearly half of Americans get some of their news from social media, and a third of adults under 30 receive their news from TikTok. Often, we engage with news we get from social media, regardless of whether we know how credible it is. A 2022 study found that when TikTok users search for the top news stories, about 20% of the videos displayed contained misinformation. Without being informed of how common misinformation is, we actively engage with this fake news and believe what we read without scrutinizing it. Pew Research Center found that nearly a quarter (23%) of Americans have shared fake news on social media, both knowingly and unknowingly. It is not enough for your election research to be solely from social media, regardless of how accurate it appears.

But how does this misinformation come across your page? Social media is known for its algorithms, so it should be no surprise that your political opinions are reinforced in your social media feeds. Algorithms jeopardize our ability to maintain a functioning, non-polarized society by creating echo chambers (environments where you only encounter information that affirms your opinions).

For example, if you support one candidate, you will only see videos of that candidate's best moments and never their slip-ups. For example, suppose you like or comment on one video of a candidate making a powerful speech. In that case, the algorithm will show you more of these candidates' best speeches because it hopes you will continue engaging with this content. This model benefits the app, causing more engagement and revenue, but it makes your feed a reflection of a singular viewpoint. Furthermore, suppose you are an undecided voter and happen to engage with a video of one candidate. In that case, you will be fed more videos of them and not the other candidate, which could completely sway your opinion. This algorithm can ultimately impact how you vote or your general political affiliation. For democracy to function, we need to engage with different perspectives and opinions, which we lose through these algorithms.

Celebrity influence over politics is also significantly heightened by social media, as many of them have platforms with large followings through which they can amplify messages. While celebrities are entirely justified in sharing their political opinions by their First Amendment right, we must critically assess the impact of these opinions' on their audience. Celebrities have been endorsing presidential candidates for decades but social media has made it increasingly common for celebrities to take to their Instagram or X accounts and ask their audience to vote for a specific candidate. Although it is hard to track the true extent of celebrity endorsements' sway on votes, they can have a significant impact on voters, especially on younger voters.

When Taylor Swift endorsed Kamala Harris in September of this year, she encouraged her followers to register to vote by linking vote.gov on her social media. On the day that Swift made this post, around 400,000 people visited vote.gov, a large leap from the average of 30,000 daily visitors. I'm not arguing that this is a bad thing, and I appreciate these celebrities speaking out about politics in an election that feels so crucial for human rights. However, it appears that these celebrity endorsements (which are made easier through social media) may be swaying people's votes in place of genuine information about the candidates.

We are living in a unique time in political history, and the election is less than a week away, on Tuesday, Nov. 5. It is more crucial than ever to research the policies of each candidate and local electors to understand who and what you are voting for. The intertwining of politics with social media can lead us to falsely believe that we are educated on the election without doing actual, thorough research. I would encourage voters to obtain a sample ballot for their state and then look at the websites and stated policies of the candidates on their ballot. An easy way to begin your research is to look into non-partisan voter guides such as BallotReady, guides.vote, and VOTE411.

Your feed can be impacted by biases, misinformation and algorithms amplifying your opinions. While social media can be an excellent tool for grassroots causes or activist groups to spread their messages, it is not a responsible place to go for politics and information on the election.

Why an Election Issue?

Notes From the Desk

Ryan McElroy *is a member of the class of 2028 and the Editor in Chief.* ***Cole Chaudhari*** *is a member of the class of 2026 and* ***Madeleine Kaptein*** *is a member of the class of 2025.5; they are Managing Editors.*

In light of the upcoming election on Nov. 5, 2024, The Campus has published a special edition devoted to the election as it manifests on campus and across Vermont. In these pages you'll find the product of dozens of hours of work from our reporters and editors, who covered statewide and local races, the impact of celebrity endorsements, how the election changed Middlebury's classrooms and so much more.

At a time when politics may feel inescapable and the anxiety of election night looms, our work this week stands as a reminder of the importance of objective, factual and earnest reporting.

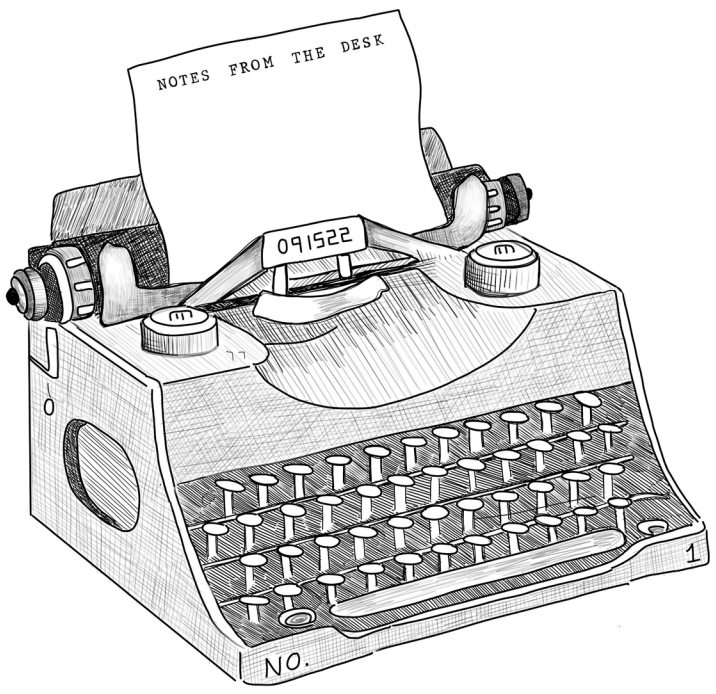
Our mission is simple: to report information you can trust and to tell stories that need to be told.

As many of our absentee ballots travel back home this week or we plan to visit Middlebury's polling station next Tuesday, we want to reaffirm our commitment to honest journalism and its importance to civic engagement.

In a time where faith in traditional media has been shaken, this is a more pressing mission than ever before. While local and statewide newspapers in Vermont struggle to get by, this week The Campus is doing our small part to cover local democracy and inform our readers about critical issues in the Green Mountain state. We aspired to cover Vermont stories big and small: Who will be Addison County's next two state Senators? Will a Republican challenger upset the incumbent lieutenant governor? And why is octogenarian Sen. Bernie Sanders so popular with people our age?

We also hope you will read beyond this note in our opinions section, which authors from a wide range of class years who have shared their views on the election in relation to social media, international humanitarian issues, undecided voters in swing states and the appeal of Washington, D.C. Even our Arts & Culture and Multimedia sections have explored consequential and uplifting stories related to U.S. politics this week — it was truly all-hands-on-deck during the past several weeks.

Hopefully you find something informative, something entertaining or maybe even something that gets you thinking in this week's Election Issue. For all the pre-election nerves and anxious tracking of absentee ballots, participating in and reporting on democracy during a presidential election remains a remarkable privilege that only comes around once every four years.



I was anxious, but now I am confident: Middlebury students will vote.

Op-Ed

Daniza Tazabekova *is a member of the class of 2026 and president of MiddVotes.*

In 2020, the then-President of MiddVotes submitted an op-ed to The Campus arguing that Middlebury students should create a more robust culture of voting. It's been four years since then, and as the current President of MiddVotes, I am proud to say that we not only has Middlebury a culture of voting, but we have been recognized by peer institutions for being leaders in civic engagement. Despite this success, students must continue to engage in state, local and national politics by voting, staying informed and interacting with the community opportunities available to them.

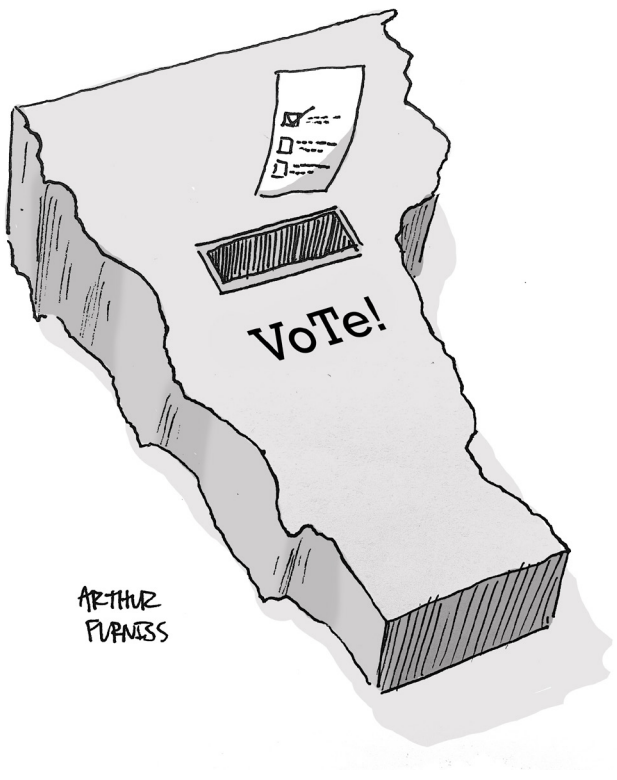
Since 2018, Middlebury has reported exceptionally high levels of voter registration, reflecting the combination of a politically engaged student body and MiddVotes' civic engagement efforts, such as speaker panels, community debate watch parties and weekly voter registration drives. Through these events, MiddVotes has engaged with more than 500 students in the last two months alone, fostering a sense of community as students help each other register to vote and watch debates together in the Grille. It has been inspiring to see dozens of students approach our voter registration tables and ask for stamps to return their absentee ballots.

Not only has the student body exhibited great excitement for the upcoming election, but the college itself has been incredibly supportive of our efforts. From allowing us to share our Faculty Voting module — an informative guide to civic engagement that students can embed into Canvas — with every professor in the school to sending us to nationwide conferences, the school has upheld its commitment to civic education. We are thankful to the administration, faculty and college organizations like the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) for supporting us by funding our travel to the 2024 NESCAC Votes Conference, allowing us to rent vans and soliciting volunteers for our drives.

The 2020 MiddVotes op-ed spelled out a myriad of ways for students to engage in local, state and national politics. For example, MiddVotes regularly encourages students to attend the annual Town Meeting Day, which is an important pillar of Vermont politics where townspeople assemble to vote on and debate local issues. Professors of Political Science Bert Johnson and Sarah Stroup previously hosted a discussion session on the history of Town Meeting Day to encourage student attendance, and MiddVotes has shuttled students to the event to encourage participation. The op-ed ended with a plea to "not sit this one out." Given the fervor, passion and participation I have witnessed while tabling so far — as well as the particular sense of urgency surrounding this election — I do not believe my peers will sit this one out. Many students here have already voted so or plan to do so on November 5, 2024. Individuals are more likely to vote when their peers plan to do so, leaving me no room to worry about whether Middlebury students will turn out to vote in what is likely their first presidential election.

MiddVotes invites students to continue to be engaged and excited about this election and politics beyond. On Nov. 4, we will hold our last voter registration drive for students who want to register to vote in Vermont, which students can do by virtue of attending Middlebury. Most importantly, we will be driving students to the Middlebury Recreation Center (154 Creek Rd) on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. so that they can vote in person. A driver, a retired staff member who volunteered to ferry students to polling places, will pick up MiddKids from Adirondack (ADK) Circle in a 15-person college-owned van at the beginning of every hour during this period. Afterwards, you can join us for a community watch party in Wilson Cafe from 7 p.m. to midnight, where Professor of Political Science Bert Johnson will provide election commentary as we follow CNN's election coverage. MiddVotes hopes students will take advantage of these opportunities.

Middlebury students understand this, having taken the steps to make their voices heard on the national level. I am proud to go to a school where voting is not just a privilege, but a priority, and I am excited to see how many students turn out to vote on Election Day.



COURTESY PHOTO / DANIZA TAZABEKOVA
MiddVotes volunteers tabling outside of Proctor Dining Hall.

MY SEMESTER IN D.C. DID NOT LIVE UP TO MY DREAMS. BUT I DON'T REGRET IT.

Op-Ed

Ting Cui *is a member of the class of 2025.5 and a Sports Editor.*

"How was study abroad?" It's the first question everyone asks when you return to Middlebury's campus after studying away for a semester. When my friends describe their semesters in Chile, Germany or Japan, their eyes light up with stories of cultural and language immersion. When I mention that my hiatus from Middlebury was not in another country, but in Washington, D.C., the response is either a passive "oh, cool" or an enthusiastic "oh, cool!" — reactions as divided as the nation's politics.

As a political science major, I grew up romanticizing D.C. through the lens of television shows like "The West Wing" and "Madam Secretary." I imagined myself joining the ranks of sharp-suited professionals power-walking between meetings, engaged in witty repartee about policy while crossing the National Mall. The Washington Semester Program (WSP) at American University seemed like my chance to step into this idealized world before graduation. The program promised transferable political science credits, professional internship connections and a taste of D.C life. It felt like the perfect choice: I wouldn't be stuck on a quiet Middlebury campus missing my abroad-bound friends. Instead, I'd be having my own adventure in America's political capital.

What I discovered wasn't quite the Aaron Sorkin script I'd dreamed up in my rural Vermont dorm room — but oddly enough, reality proved more compelling than fiction. It turns out that the real D.C., with all its imperfections, is far more fascinating than the one I'd imagined. And it was in the complications of this reality that I discovered who I wanted to be.

The program itself was a study in contrasts. While my "International Peace and Security" course delivered the D.C. experience I'd hoped for — site visits to the World Bank, U.S Institute of Peace, and a U.S-North Korea peace talk simulation at the Stimson Center — other classes felt like meandering tours of the city's less-interesting institutions. While these experiences were less structured, they occasionally offered unexpected insights. A guest lecture by disability advocate Betty Siegel, for example, forever changed how I view something as simple as an electric scooter lying on a sidewalk.

The most striking difference between Middlebury and D.C. was the ubiquitous and open nature of political discourse. At Middlebury, political discussions often feel cautious or tentative, with students careful not to disrupt the predominantly liberal consensus. In D.C., politics wasn't just another subject — it was the air people breathed.

My classmates came from across the political spectrum and were eager to debate everything from abortion restrictions to gun rights. By the end of the semester, I found myself missing Middlebury's more tame atmosphere, where not every conversation had to circle back to politics.

My National Press Club internship with Robert Weiner Associates had me co-authoring opinion pieces that were far from the nonpartisan journalism I'd imagined. Though I often felt like I was crafting liberal manifestos, the experience was undeniably productive. I published eight op-eds in national newspapers, drafted press releases and compiled media lists — substantive work compared to the coffee runs my friends endured while interning in congressional offices. Through (respectful) debates with my boss, Bob, I learned that my political leanings are less staunchly liberal and more moderate than I'd thought. Perhaps most valuable of all, my conversations with journalists at the National Press Club helped me realize that journalism isn't my calling.

Outside the classrooms and offices of D.C., you might spot Japanese and Turkish diplomats walking down Embassy Row together on their way to lunch. Perhaps you'll have a chance encounter with a congressional representative outside the U.S. Capitol. It felt pretty cool to tell my professor, "Sorry I'm late, there was a presidential motorcade." The city constantly reminded me that I was in the heart of American power while still very much being a college student finding my way.

This constant proximity to power comes with its own social code. People in Washington joke that the longer your job title is, the less important you are. There was a palpable sense of a social hierarchy in a program and city where everyone seems to be doing something important. This can feel either inspiring or exhausting. It often left me missing Middlebury's more authentic social culture, where you're valued for who you are rather than what's on your resume.

I spent weekends exploring the countless museums, discovering vintage flea markets and sampling diverse cuisines from various restaurants. Admittedly, these urban excursions came with a steeper price tag than a dinner at Proctor. I also experienced some uniquely D.C. moments: "monumenting" late at night, giving lost tourists directions to the White House and even attending a Valentine's Day ball at the Italian Embassy where WSP students transformed proper ballroom dancing into something decidedly more collegiate.

So, when people ask about my "study abroad" experience, I'm tempted to say it was "interesting," a safe and ambiguous word that could mean anything. But the truth is more nuanced. My semester in D.C. wasn't the glossy political drama I'd imagined, but rather a behind-the-scenes look at how our nation's capital actually functions.

I never did master the "walk and talks" I'd seen and admired on television. Instead, I gained something more useful: a heightened understanding of the city's reality complete with its partisan frustrations and unexpected opportunities — and a better sense of my own goals and values.

"THE BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR!"
AWARDSWATCH
"KARLA SOFÍA GASCÓN IS EXTRAORDINARY."
RollingStone
EXCLUSIVE ADVANCE SCREENING RECEPTION AT 6
"THERE IS NO OTHER MOVIE LIKE EMILIA PÉREZ"
VANITY FAIR
"ZOE SALDAÑA BLAZES ACROSS THE SCREEN!"
THEWRAP.
WINNER CANNES FILM FESTIVAL BEST ACTRESS | JURY PRIZE
UN FILM DE JACQUES AUDIARD
"SELENA GOMEZ IS SPARKING ON ALL CYLINDERS!"
SCREEN
IN SELECT THEATERS NOVEMBER 1
NETFLIX | NOVEMBER 13
HIRSCHFIELD THURSDAYS
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 7th, 7PM
DANA AUDITORIUM
INTERNATIONAL CUISINE CRAWL & RAFFLE
& DISCUSSION LED BY PROFESSOR CHRIS KEATHLEY
FREE ADMISSION
HIRSCHFIELD

SO PERCUSSION AND CAROLINE SHAW TRANSFIX AUDIENCE WITH ACOUSTIC POETRY

By CHRISTY LIANG
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTO / CAROLINE SHAW

Caroline Shaw and Sō Percussion performing. Their performance included a vareity of instrumentation, including percussion, sampled poetry and electric piano.

On Oct. 25, Middlebury welcomed Sō Percussion and Caroline Shaw for a mind-boggling night of acoustic poetry. With soulful chanting, processional tempo and impeccably layered percussion sounds from novel instruments, the group cast the audience in an enthralled trance.

The sounds featured a complex assembly of diverse elements. Percussive sounds stacked upon a base layer of melody, which accompanied or, at times, deliberately overpowered the vocalists' singing. The diversity of percussion featured Fender Rhodes—a kind of electric piano— vibraphones, organs, steel drums and everyday items such as flower pots. Even sounds of ripping duct tape and pouring water innovatively found their way into the acoustic complex.

The show was as much an acoustic as a visual experience, with spotlights serving as theatrical props. Each musician on stage was illuminated by a spotlight, which was turned on and off in conjunction with the music. This interplay of light and sound elevated the show into a multisensory feat. Every musician on stage played with a visible sense of abandon as if music was a substance flowing through them. There were moments that bordered on delirium that were especially invigorating to watch — this musical intensity gave a visceral feeling to the performance.

What struck me as extraordinary about the music was how, despite its structural complexity, its emotive effect on the audience was immediate and potent. As the percussion sounds merged into a steady tempo, they gained a processional energy. Blended with Shaw's resonant and piercing voice calling far into the distance, the multilayered music evoked feelings of poignancy, contemplation and infinitude. The dreamlike trance it cast over me as I sat transfixed was reminiscent of Cocteau Twins, and the processional undertone felt similar to certain tracks on Japanese Breakfast's 2021 album "Jubilee".

Apart from the innovative and versatile approach to sounds, Sō Percussion succeeded in completely blurring the line between speech and music. A seemingly spontaneous introductory speech about the upcoming song would segue seamlessly into the music, with the last word of the speech echoed on repeat, acquiring musicality as it bled into the next song. One of the songs was performed entirely in speech, where five artists uttered varied fragments of the sentence "This is not making sense". From uttering single words to spelling out each letter, the waves of human voice climbed on a crescendo and reached a fervent breaking point before coming to a stop where they exclaimed in unison: "This makes sense!"

Midway through the performance, I wrote down in my journal: "This is poetry." Indeed, the music was literally poetic; almost all of the song lyrics are sourced from famous literary texts. Excerpts from "Ulysses" by James Joyce, "The Sacred Harp" by the 18th-century poet and hymnist Anne Steele and verses from Anne Carson, Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein,William Black and others found their way into the lyrics. The narrativity of the group's musical composition is remarkable. It is music that possesses a rich interiority, wrestles with unanswerable questions and disturbs as much as it soothes the senses.

Christian A. Johnson Professor Emeritus of Music Peter Hamlin attended the show, and shared his thoughts with The Campus.

"It's really interesting how she [Caroline Shaw] combines vocal techniques from all over the world, many of them ancient. So, in a way, it's a combination of elemental and fresh. A metaphor I came up with while listening was how, at every moment, there is a door with a whole new sound in it, " Hamlin said.

Stephen Abbot, professor of mathematics, also shared his experience of the show: "I couldn't figure out how to listen to it at the beginning. It felt like trying to read Shakespeare—it's English, but it's not going in. Somewhere in the middle, I let go of my expectations and figured out what river I was in." "The river is a great metaphor," responded Peter Hamlin, "because when you're in a river, you can't fight where you're going."

This sentiment of being carried away is echoed in Caroline Shaw's impulse to compose the music in the first place. "When I perform pieces by other composers, I often hear the music going somewhere else in my head," said Shawl, quoted in the program for the show.

For the listeners, the music similarly represents a kind of journey. We were all born in the waves of sounds —"elemental and fresh," ancient and modern, natural and instrumental — towards a final resting place of awe.

PFL WEEKLY

Welcome back to another week of PFL! This week, we discussed all the excitement of the upcoming NESCAC tournaments and last minute ranking changes - which events will Midd end up hosting? We welcomed Audrey Maclean '27 and Steph Renouf '27 to the studio from the Women's Cross Country team. We talked all things running- training, recruiting, different courses, and more! We did some exciting trivia and finished with an ELECTRIC Mount Rushmore of Halloween candies. Who do you think won? Thanks for listening!

Campaign Culture: The impact of celebrities and anthems on U.S. elections

By NORAH KHAN and VIRGINIA FRAU
Arts & Culture Editors

Nowadays, it seems like presidential campaigns cannot exist without celebrity influence.

Celebrities like Megan Thee Stallion, Beyoncé, Julia Roberts and Bruce Springsteen have all endorsed Kamala Harris, appearing at events to rally support among voters.

However, do these endorsements actually have an impact on elections and voter involvement? Studies point to yes. Data from a recent study by Ashley Spillane at the Harvard Kennedy School suggests that there is a strong correlation between celebrity influence and voter engagement.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as states gradually revised their voting legislation to prohibit voting on the basis of race and gender rather than on the basis of property ownership, there arose a need to disseminate campaign information to a new kind of voting base — one less familiar with the political process and on average, less literate.

"Voters respond better to authentic messaging from influencers that conveys personal passion and doesn't require a high production value," said Spillane. "Celebrities, defined broadly as famous people, are distinctively positioned to tackle this critical issue because of their ability to garner media coverage, attract large crowds, reach their fans, and influence society."

Campaign anthems were a precisesharpened vehicle for political messaging and they were designed to be easily replicable before commercial music reproduction. Today, however, candidates' songs are no longer written or even lyricized for them individually. Frank Sinatra's "High Hopes" (written for 1960 presidential candidate John F. KennedyJFK, 'the nation's favorite guy') is now supplanted by Beyoncé's "Freedom", chosen as Harris's official campaign song and as the accompaniment to her "We Choose Freedom" ad. But if you were to ask one demographic of voters in particular (hint: they sit next to you in all your classes) what they associate most with the Vice President, it's more likely to be her coconut tree -analogy than any of Beyoncé's music.

And personally, more memorable than any of the cameos at the Democratic National ConventionDNC's cameos is Chappel Roan's refusal decline to perform at the White House for Pride Month this past summer. "We want liberty, freedom and justice for all. When you do that, that's when I'll come," Roan said during her set at the Governor's Ball in New York.

No amount of media training will make Harris or Trump as effectively repostable as young entertainers like Roan. There's an obvious power in that kind of influence, in raveable likeability, in being the kind of public figure that thrives on 20-30 sec interview clips and catchy one-liners.

It is important to note that many celebrities choose to get involved with politics to benefit their brand positioning and image in society.

This September, a single Instagram story from Taylor Swift calling for voter registration, had an immeasurable democratic impact. The post drew 337,826 visitors to the vote.gov site within the 24 hours it was up online.

Authenticity is important to voters, so when their favorite celebrity makes a political statement, campaigning and engagement can feel much more relevant and important. For example, some Swifties have decided to get more involved in local campaigning after seeing posts from the star online.

This past weekend, Puerto Rican artist and global superstar Bad Bunny endorsed Harris in an Instagram story after harmful and racist comments about his home country were made by speakers at a Trump rally event in New York City. This act could boost Latino support within Harris' base, which has weakened since the beginning of her campaign and is an important demographic she must secure to succeed in November.

Think about it: – Iif your favorite artist endorsed a certain candidate online, would you feel more inclined to engage with the campaign? Maybe yes, maybe no. Nevertheless, celebrities play an important role in impacting voter behavior.

It is not just Democrats who rely on celebrity endorsement —— several right-wing celebrities have vocalized their support for Trump. Billionaire Elon Musk's Super PAC has been rewarding supporters who sign his petition in support of First and Second Amendment freedoms, with the chance to win one million dollars. The sweepstakes, which have been labeled as an illegal lottery, caused the Philadelphia District Attorney to sue Musk for possibly violating federal laws around bribery. Other celebrities like actor Mel Gibson, online sensation Joe Exotic and boxer Mike Tyson, among others, have all pledged their support for the GOP candidate.

LAWRENCE JACKSON / WHTE HOUSE
Pop superstar Olivia Rodrigo with Vice President Kamala Harris.

Podcasts work similarly to celebrity endorsement, they allow candidates to tap into a certain and very specific demographic while in a controlled environment. Harris recently went on the "Call Her Daddy" podcast with host Alexandra Cooper to speak about women's health issues like abortion rights. The show often discusses topics like sex and relationships. The show gave Harris a unique opportunity to speak to a variety of voters —– about half of the audience says they're Democrats, a quarter says they're Republican and about 20% say they're independent. She also appeared on "All the Smoke", hosted by former NBA stars Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson.

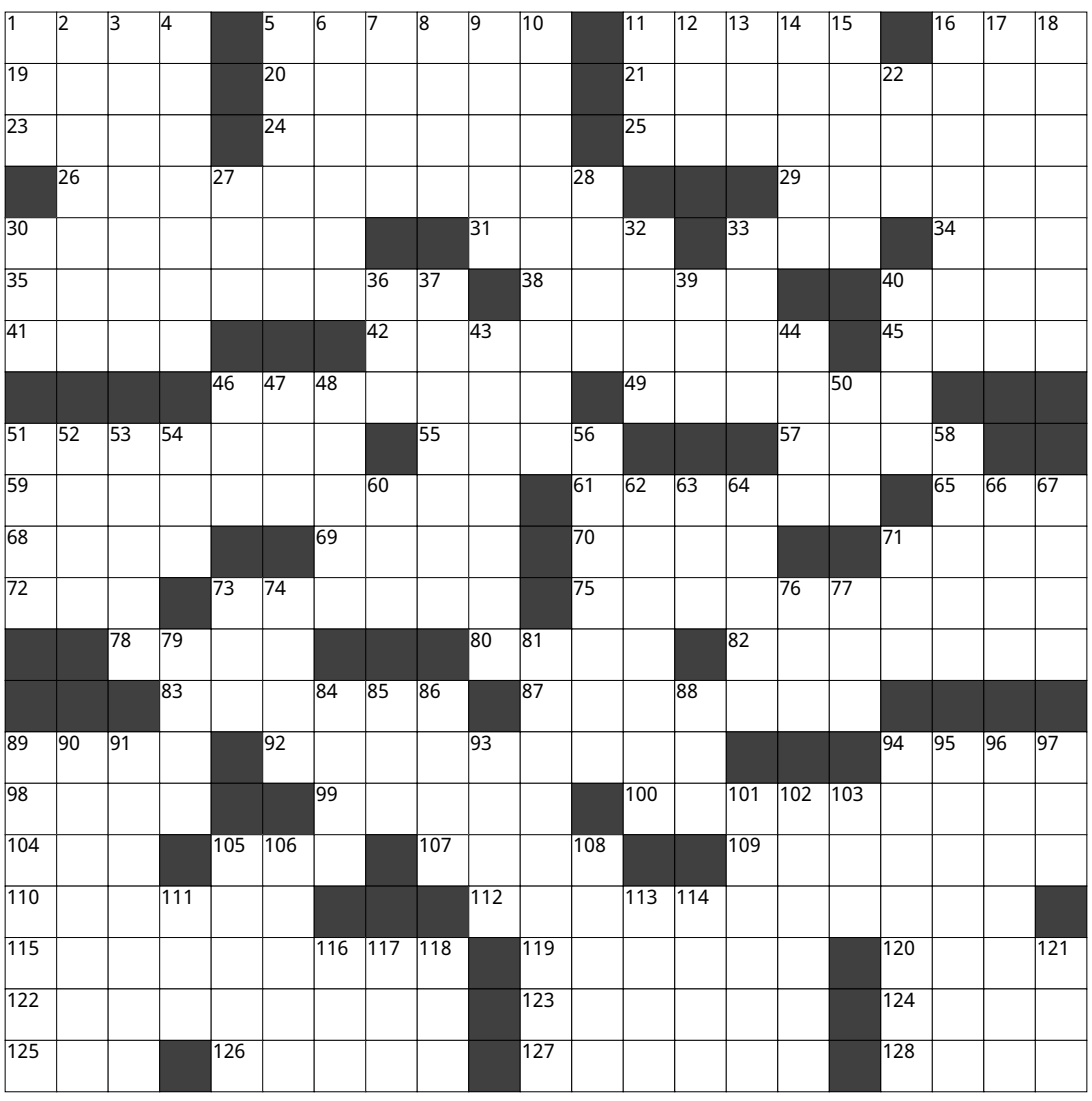
"Call Her Daddy" ranks in seventh place among all U.S. podcasts, third among all women, and second among women between the ages of 18-29. "All the Smoke" holds 86th place in U.S. podcasts, and 18th among African-Americans, with an audience overwhelmingly male (89%) mostly ages 25-44.

Trump has appeared on the "Joe Rogan Experience" podcast for a three-hour episode that aimed to bolster support from male listeners. He also appeared on "This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von" which ranks fifth among men 18-34 and the "Lex Fridman Podcast" which ranks 36th among white men.

Whether or not you're influenced by celebrity anthems and endorsements, their impact is undeniably significant on politics as a whole.

Who's It Gonna Be?

Puzzle Master Josh Harkins



ACROSS
1 In the thick of
5 Maximum
11 Shoots a round
16 Rejections
19 Fibber
20 Settle up ahead of time
21 Rehab, for example
23 President Barbie portrayer Rae
24 Keyboard key for vertical scrolling
25 Debate
26 Voter in a 59-Across
29 Beach hut
30 Kurosawa's "Seven ___"
31 Slushie maker
33 Hockey sin bin stat
34 Calendar unit
35 What might lead to an 11-Down charge
38 Chili variety
40 Chill
41 Saint Petersburg's river
42 Hits the sack
45 Like a line, for short
46 Gets called up to the big leagues, say
49 Chinese noodle dish
51 Big name in translational stones
55 Logic word with "if"
57 Length x width
59 Pivotal locale in American elections
61 Air expedition expediting, for short
65 Recent, as a bad memory
68 President preceder
69 Hook's first mate
70 "A man without a ___ is a man without protection" -Lyndon Johnson
71 Musician Guthrie
72 Waste
73 Country ruled by a *Druk Gyalpo*, or Dragon King
75 In the clear
78 3-term mayor of Burlington Weinberger
80 Mix
82 Charges, in a way
83 With 87-Across, lead in every newspaper in America next week?
87 See 83-Across
89 Lust (for)
92 Ghostbusters material
94 Army NCO
98 Perlman of "Cheers"
99 A situation that can be cut with a knife
100 October holiday that this puzzle, regrettably, is not about
104 Warzone roadside danger
105 Bout enders, for short
107 "¿Como ___ usted?"
109 Most spooky
110 Croatian capital
112 Change sides
115 Reservation service used by more than 60,000 restaurants
119 Better than a C
120 Disease of Kings, such as Henry VIII
122 Realm of Odin
123 Lewinsky portrayer Feldstein
124 Currency in
125 Donkey
126 Talks up
127 Words to live by in improv
128 Hwys.

DOWN
1 Liston vainqueur
2 Try to put a USB-C charger into an old iPhone?
3 I, Robot author's 1994 memoir
4 Transylvanian Count
5 Rome's __ Way
6 Like Romeo and Juliet's ending
7 Bigger than kilo
8 ___AI, maker of ChatGPT
9 Like most of the Arabian peninsula
10 Puts in a typical role
11 Felony namesake for 5 video games
12 Bruins legend Bobby
13 It contains the fibula
14 The man who got us through Covid, Dr. Anthony
15 Hot, hot water
16 Voter in a 59-Across
17 What Zendaya and Ichiro use
18 Left the path
22 Swarm
27 Charlemagne's domain, abbr.
28 Musical with a Broadway-debut cast including Anthony Rapp and Idina Menzel
30 9-digit ID
32 Environmental subj.
33 Output of Nash or Poe
36 Get older
37 Pinkish floral brew
39 Game of Thrones net.
40 What mothers frequently insist must change before heated conversations can continue
43 Fisher and Gu, for two
44 Word preceding John or me
46 Congresswoman known for spreading conspiracy theories, for short
47 @@@
48 Japanese breaded chicken dish
50 Rage
51 Many an invite response
52 "That hurt!"
53 Command to an attack dog
54 Chemical suffix
56 "Ta-da!"
58 Rice, in La Rioja
60 Qty.
62 How a Gen-Z farmer might describe their crops?
63 DOJ division
64 Opposite of grand
66 Plant that soothes the skin
67 Pans ideal for fried rice
71 Tuna variety
73 Support provider
74 ___ in on
76 Rake neighbor in a shed
77 Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix's is on page 766
79 When outside of the box, even better
81 Dipsy, Laa-Laa, Po, or Tinky-Winky
84 Hams it up
85 5G precursor
86 It's over steak
88 Garth Brooks has won their "Entertainer of the Year" award 7 times, abbr.
89 A 59-Across with 11 electoral votes
90 Stingy sorts
91 Gardeners focusing on bushes
93 "Hey, you!"
94 Partner swapper
95 Shows the door
96 Thumbs up, for example
97 "Inside the NBA" channel
101 Novelist Ursula K. ___
102 Let
103 "___ quit!" (ultimatum)
105 ___ One vodka
106 "Becoming" author Michelle
108 ___ de l'Air: French Air Force
111 Many ER staffers
113 Long and Vardalos, for two
114 Elsa's sister in Frozen
116 Mitt Romney's alma mater, abbr.
117 Inc. relative
118 Pauses in speech
121 Talking-___ (scoldings)

2024 MIDDPRIDE: REFLECTIONS ON AUTHENTICITY

By JUNE SU
Senior Multimedia Editor

It was finally Oct. 12, and I was walking towards the town green for the third annual MiddPride, hearing cheers of children and live music getting louder, and seeing flashes of rainbow shine under the autumn sunshine. Having recently attended a Pride parade in Hollywood, overrun with corporations such as Disney and Citibank and law enforcement groups like the Los Angeles Police Department, the authenticity of this close community boasting queerness was palpable.

Passionately organized by the Middlebury Teen Center and the Ilsley Public Library, families and friends gathered on this warm afternoon under the shade of brilliant red foliage. Folks marched in a parade around town, competed in a costume contest and shopped at local vendors in an outdoor market. While teenagers and kids skated on a rail and ramp set up by organizers, others received information about queer advocacy networks, bounced in bounce houses and connected with loved ones all while proudly celebrating queer identity.

JUNE SU / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Top: Professor Kemi Fuentes-George in drag at a different Pride event.
Bottom: The event was held on the Town Green.

The event has grown from humble beginnings since the first MiddPride in 2021 with turnout growing from a couple dozen to 800 attendees this October. Elio Farley '24.5, head of a Teen Center group for queer and questioning youth and a founder of MiddPride, told The Campus about the community that has come together to make the event blossom over the years. This includes a significant donation by the University of Vermont Porter Medical Center last year and grants from various organizations such as the Better Middlebury Partnership, Champlain Valley Unitarian Universality Society, and the Addison Independent. Also, a grassroots fundraising campaign by Farley boasted over $1000.

At the center of operations with the Isley Library is the Middlebury Teen Center, which has been providing care and programming for adolescents in Middlebury, free of cost. The center has ironically reached adulthood, having turned 18 years old this year.

Lindsey Fuentes-George, director of the Teen Center and a founder of MiddPride, spoke in an interview with The Campus on how she applies a certain philosophy in her work with LGBTQ+ youth.

She referenced a quote from the mother of X González, a student activist from the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, in which the mother laments that she could not have been "in front" of her child when her generation, now adults, should have "dealt with the issue [of gun violence] twenty years ago."

"It is our job [as adults] to be in front. So for every adult that shows up with their toddlers, or every adult who just shows up because they went for a coffee and they see us — what you're doing is you're standing in front of those teens and saying, "We are the community that will protect you if you need it," Lindsey Fuentes-George said.

There is a clear foundation of care for LGBTQ+ youth and people at the core of MiddPride. The lack of humanity I experienced at the corporate pride event — which many experience in the Western world — was nowhere to be seen at MiddPride. Instead of hordes of workers wearing branded merchandise from their organizations and cheaply waving a rainbow flag, I saw families decked in their unique pride outfits sitting on the lawn swaying to music by local bands. I talked to a representative at Vermont Adult Learning, who informed me about their local initiative to provide education to people who did not have the chance to finish school, and a man with a delightfully curled mustache tabling with information from Rutland County Pride.

Despite seeing nearly every corporation light up with rainbow-themed posturing in the month of June, and the material ability to legally get married to a partner of the same-sex, queer struggles continue to be marginalized in the United States. Queer people in the U.S. experience disproportionate violence and psychological harm due to discrimination and social stigmatization.

According a 2024 Trevor Project report, more than 1.8 million LGBTQ+ young people (ages 13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. — and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds. The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law used data from 2017-2018 found data to show that transgender people are over four times more likely than cisgender people to experience violent victimization, including rape, sexual assault and aggravated or simple assault.

"And of course, this being an election year, our teens are horribly anxious about what's going to happen. But, again, that's where that resilience comes from. Like, that's the adults in your life saying, like, I'm here to protect you. I'm here to make sure your rights are respected," Lindsey Fuentes-George said, discussing how current events factored into the pride event and how it is a key time to come together to demonstrate collective power.

Kemi Fuentes-George is political science professor at Middlebury involved in MiddPride through musical contribution. He performed in drag as the guitarist of The Almohandras, a local band at MiddPride. He spoke to The Campus about the culture shock he felt when he emigrated to the States from Jamaica, providing key international context for US pride.

"Are there things that I can do [now with gender performance] that I just didn't have the opportunity to do when I was in Jamaica? Because literally, in Jamaica, you're gonna be taking your life into your hands in certain places if you perform gender differently than the mainstream," Kemi Feuntes-George said.

Kemi Fuentes-George explained that these revelations came after seeking out queer people and discovering how different people can undertake self expression. These experiences not only triggered personal insight, but also led him to think about how LGBTQ+ people are perceived.

"Because people became, no longer the monsters that they're portrayed of in the media, but just like regular people that you'd meet," Feuntes-George said.

Visibility, emphasized as a turning point for Kemi Fuentes-George, is crucial to a healthy queer community. Especially during a heated political climate concerning queer rights, Pride represents a brave political resistance while also being a joyful celebration.

Authentic awareness of queer people and of local queer issues, especially among vulnerable youth, is a necessary nuance that was seen at MiddPride. Kathryn Laliberte, Teen Librarian at the Ilsley Public Library of Middlebury and a founder of MiddPride, remarked in an interview with The Campus on how the MiddPride, celebrating out and proud, was impactful for her teen advisory group experiencing hardship due to the ways they identified.

"They were experiencing a lot of homophobic and transphobic bullying in school, and they didn't feel like the administration was very responsive," Laliberte said. "They were really looking for community support and acknowledgement and love, and this was a way to show them that community love."

Middlebury's youth were a target audience of the event and provided key input and aid for planning. Rafaela, a local highschooler and intern at the Ilsley Library and youth assistant to MiddPride spoke to The Campus about the organization of the event.

"I feel like a lot of the time, teens don't feel like they're a part of a community. But there are people like Elio and Catherine and Lindsay who are working to make them feel seen, make them feel part of the community, and make their voices heard and feel welcomed in their space," Rafaela said

The thoughtfulness and care that the Ilsley Public Library and the Teen Center have for their queer teens was clearly evident during the event. I didn't know what it would be like to attend pride in a rural, small-town environment but was overjoyed to see the turnout, the authentic awareness of issues affecting vulnerable queer populations and the vibrant community of MiddPride.

Top: Attendees dressed to impress in Pride-themed clothing.
Bottom: The founders of MiddPride: Lindsey Fuentes-George, Kathryn Laliberte, and Elio Farley.